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MEAN STREETS



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Cinemonkey

A serious film journal.

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Notes

Semiology and Structuralism have often been noted for obscurity, but rarely for vulgarity. In a recent issue of *Ciné-tracts* (#3), Barbara Leaming, while discussing certain obvious/obscure points in *Sisters* suddenly erupts into violently adolescent zeal: "The three reels and the celluloid wrapped around them constitute the body of SISTERS' filmic text. That body is going to be consistently hacked apart by the analyst, even despite himself, for the film does not exist as a whole by itself. So just as Danielle Breton hacks the body apart in the film's diegesis, so one must hack the body of the text apart in order to read the film [Italics in original]." She goes on to describe how, to read the film, one must separate it "from all the other texts which one does not analyze in relation to it — just as the Siamese twins in SISTERS are violently separated." One can imagine the recommended critical approach to, say, the De Laurentis *King Kong*: "The film, then, would be better stamped out of existence, just as Charles Grodin is squashed by Kong himself."

Our favorite semiologist continues to be Raymond Bellour, whose Englished works occasionally trickle into the U.S. As an excellent introduction to Bellour we recommend the second issue of *Camera Obscura* (P.O. Box 4517, Berkeley, Ca., 94704) which contains his analysis of the first few minutes of Hitchcock's *Marnie*. On page 102, in footnote 2, can be found a brief bibliography of Bellour's semiological musings.

We would like to compare two scenes from two recent films, both of which are references to the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*; I am thinking of the films *Phantom of the Paradise* and the Mel Brooks comedy *High Anxiety*. This viewer is becoming weary of film references, homages, parodies, if only for the reason that these proliferating homages no longer seem sincere, spontaneous. Above all, however, they are never fully integrated into the film...but before I begin to generalize wildly, let me pinpoint the difference between the approaches of De Palma and Brooks. It is not possible here to make a grand defense

for *Phantom of the Paradise*, and in any case, to a certain degree it is an unsuccessful film. I only intend to show that De Palma is not simply stealing from Hitchcock, as he has so often been accused by the reviewers. But first *High Anxiety*: Brooks is Thorndyke (Thornhill), a psychiatrist in San Francisco for a convention, but also entangled in a conspiracy concerning the asylum of which he is director. It is complicated to explain, but, as he checks into a hotel, he has a strong (plot-motivated) desire to read the most recent paper, and so requests one from the bell-boy. The bell-boy reacts in a somewhat (but characteristically Brooksonian) manic fashion. We think at first this is because Brooks is trying to make a joke about the rudeness of hotel staffs. A comic interlude. In his room, again Thorndyke asks for the paper, to which again the bell-hop reacts with extreme indignation. Brooks calls the desk for certain reasons, and adds parenthetically that he would like the bell-hop reminded... The clerk tells the bell-hop, who just happens to be passing by, to remember to take a paper to Thorndyke. The bell-hop overreacts. The clerk looks at him, mystified; illogically, unless one of them is new on the job. Brooks prepares to shower and we view a reasonable facsimile of the series of shots from the beginning of the *Psycho* shower scene (feet removing slippers, etc.), but by no means an exact reproduction. The cinematically illiterate half of the audience is itself mystified at the, perhaps forced, laughter of the other half of the audience at a series of shots in which there is nothing inherently funny. The familiar dark blur swings open a door, the curtain is thrown aside and the bell-boy stabs at Thorndyke with a rolled up newspaper. The ink swirls into the drain.

I don't believe that the incredible flatness of the entire sequence can be communicated in words. Afterwards we ask ourselves why nothing in the scene makes sense, the way a movie plot is commonly expected to make sense, and we are left frustrated; until we realize, that is, the length to which Brooks went to set-up a rather stale punch-line. The film, which has been up to this point a collection of referential punch-lines, comes once again to a dead-stop, as Brooks bends the plot into warped tangles in his effort to pay homage. The sequence must be seen to feel its maddeningly forced quality.

Turning our attention to *Phantom*

of the *Paradise* we can see instantly how more fully De Palma's use of a similar shower scene is integrated into the context of the picture. Beef, the macho/homosexual rock star (played by the brilliant and under appreciated Gerrit Graham, who has also appeared more recently in *Pretty Baby*, *Cannonball*, and *Demon Seed*), resented by the Phantom because he is about to perform music the Phantom/Winslow Leach feels should be sung by Phoenix, pacing about in his dressing room before show time, ridiculed by Philbin, who attributes Beef's apprehensions to drugs ("I know drug real from real real!"), decides to take a shower, and, wearing his ridiculous shower cap, consuming heaped spoonfuls of cocaine until, suddenly conscious, he composes himself before one of Swan's ubiquitous television cameras, steps into the stall, singing portions of the Faust piece. Again the ominous dark blur. A blade slicing the shower curtain; a scream from Beef; then a simple bathroom plunger is thrust over his mouth as the Phantom warns Beef against performing. Granted that the main impetus of the scene may be that of homage; nonetheless, there is nothing "Hitchcockian" in the framing or editing, and there are no circumlocutions in getting Beef into the shower. Once there, what happens to him is a logical realization of possibilities already in the story. What's more important, the scene is funny; the knife is misleading, but acceptable, making more funny our realization that the weapon is, instead, a plunger.

These two films in their similarity offer a concise lesson in good and bad film references. If only it were always so easy to compare and contrast. The execrable *High Anxiety* has to be seen, unfortunately, in order to fully apprehend the differences, but the serious film student, one hopes, can live with the facets of his mind which are insulted so easily by this film.

Commercials, a topic for disparaging conversation with virtually everyone addicted to television, rather than losing potency in the commerce of word-of-mouth gain museum notoriety. Advertisers, like the army sergeants who encourage complaint, amongst the PFCs, thus defusing rebellion, also seem to court infamy. Commercials have not been analysed enough; they should be analyzed out of their effectiveness. I am not only speaking of the more outrageous and

sexually explicit examples (in which, for instance, a toothpaste is guaranteed to increase one's rate of intercourse, or in which a car is offered as a superior substitute for sex), but also of the "simple" commercials advertising everyday products, such as appliances, food, and clothing. Take for possible analysis a recent coffee ad that, while containing only ten shots, creates an ambience of frustration and yearning in the midst of offering (fragmented) slices of "life." The shots are as follows:

(1) The young married couple, involved in their own reveries, sitting at the breakfast table. The overriding theme song begins, indicating that there are certain portions of the day when coffee tastes "especially good."

(2) A close-up of the husband as he sips and then goes, "Ah!" (He does not actually say "Ah" himself; this is supplied by the female singers).

(3) The wife in her sewing room, where an enormous pair of decorative scissors hang on the wall over her right shoulder.

(4) Close-up of the wife. She sips. "Ah!"

(5) The wife and the husband, on or next to a couch on which sits the parents of the husband (presumably, because the father, played by the distinguished character actor Bill Baldwin, bears a slight resemblance to the husband).

(6) The father sipping. "Ah!"

(7) The obligatory shot of the product. We see a coffee cup, sitting beside which is a can of the product. A pot magically pours the coffee into the cup, emitting a steam that must have necessitated reducing the temperature in the studio to below zero.

(8) Extreme close-up of the wife, as she again sips. This time, for only a fraction of a second, she looks into the camera. Immediate cut to:

(9) The coffee can, its animated lid opening. "Ah!"

Thus ends the commercial. But not its existence in our lives. It is not pleasant to contemplate the attitudes to life generated by the effects of seeing this commercial. I would only be able to reiterate points made by such writers as Vance Packard and Wilson Bryan Key, as well as Roland Barthes in such articles as his "Soap-powders and Detergents" in *Mythologies*. And perhaps I can also only reiterate thoughts the regular viewer has already had. Let me briefly summarize

aspects of this commercial that I find insidious.

One effect of this commercial, something it has in common with all commercials, indeed all cinema, is that life is segmented into sharply honed units of perfection, excluding such embarrassing spontaneities as burning one's tongue on the coffee, burping, etc. Movies do this, especially classical Hollywood: the poignant love scene ending with the passionate kiss and the decrescendo supplied by Max Steiner. What happens next? We don't know, and we don't need to know. It is not the function of narrative cinema to instruct us in the fundamental facts of life. We are left in a romantic mood in which abstraction reigns. Much of art focuses on high points rather than the boring human environment in-between. Of course, though art may be "misleading" in this sense, it is not trying to sell you coffee (although it may, to touch on a moot and inexhaustible point, be trying to sell an ideological bill of goods).

Here we have tiny segments of clean, relaxed, and everyday normal American life, at breakfast, with family (but always at home), etc. These high points are orchestrated rhythmically to the music, as well as to the intangible rhythm of group clusters: pair, single, four, giving an all pervasive air to this simple coffee, that is, it's *always* good, not just as certain "times of the day." We are given over to yearning for these pure, lived-in moments, here as also in the soft drink commercials where brief high points of fun-loving and fun-having youngsters are inextricably associated with pop. Do we associate the acquisition of these moments with the purchase and consumption of the fluids? Advertisers seem to think we do.

There is also the castration theme, of course; how can one view a woman in these still Freud-haunted times, with scissors prominently displayed, and not think of castration. I do not wish to suggest that the message of this shot is confined to one of castration. Nor do I propose to account for how the scissors got there; only with the fact of their presence. The wife is (or was) sewing after all, with its suggestion of uniting, mending, being a homemaker. Nonetheless there is some tension here between castration and union. Nor must this message be clear. If we assume the presence of a subconscious as Freud described it, the crudest data will make itself felt. At any rate, as we

watch this olio of images and ponder their possible inter-connections, she sips and experiences an "ah" (possibly something better than an orgasm; they have no children — which is not to say that children are a morally necessary outcome of orgasm, but, unless I've been mis-educated, children have been known to emerge from sexual relations. And since the wife is sewing, being "motherly," and, since this is currently considered a conservative course, she cannot be associated with such "atrocities" as contraception). One is always in danger of "reading too much" into commercials, not because there isn't "too much" there, but because what is there, is so inchoate.

Commercials tread between but two possibilities, Acceptance or Rejection/Acceptance (only public service announcements embrace Rejection alone). Our coffee commercial is of the first order noted, for we do not have the common wavering amidst two or three brands before lighting on the champion, or the repugnant experience of ring-around-the-collar and house-a-tosis. No, we are in the soothing, calm kingdom of pure acceptance, without questions, anxiety, and where traditions are valued; notice that the son is sitting at the feet of the father, looking up at him as if waiting to accept the oral tradition; also note that, if memory serves, the son passes the coffee to the father; the old can learn from the young, also. There is very little movement in the film, unusual for commercials, as if we were in the presence of several magazine ads, with their beautiful models, being flipped in succession. Again segmentation.

With the penultimate shot a human for the first time acknowledges the viewer. The wife sips, looks and accepts the viewer. The woman viewer may find reassurance in this look, but I think that most men would experience something faintly sexual. The French would have a field day with this shot. From Sartre to Lacan *en Regard* has been a fascinating focus for thinking. Suffice it for my scope here to say that just as the shock of the woman's acknowledgement subsides, and we begin to respond, the woman is withdrawn, replaced, in the precise part of the frame where were her eyes, with the climactic and comical flapping of the inhuman can exposing its mound of beans. How can the viewer complete this look? It's obvious. And futile.

N.O. Grace

RULES OF THE GAME



Scorsese's MEAN STREETS

By Rick Hermann

He don't understand that it's a business...

—Tony

In Scorsese's more recent career, no film has really purported to tackle such a complexity of character interactions with the kind of life-or-death urgency that drives the inhabitants of *Mean Streets*. It is his most intricately ordered universe, a matrix of life and death comprised of an interlocking arrangement of honor, trust, and friendship. Order, both as a theme relating the characters to a social environment and as a component of Scorsese's tight narrative symmetry, informs this world with a desperate fatalism. Within the hierarchy of power in New York's Little Italy, Charlie (Harvey Keitel) — an understudy for position in his uncle's sphere of influence — is pulled in different directions by conscience, personal loyalty, and the impulse to survive. His brother-like relationship with an irresponsible and self-destructive punk, Johnny Boy (Robert DeNiro), becomes the ambiguous moral focus of the story, which turns upon an antagonism between that friendship and the economic context to which Charlie must

inevitably conform. What evolves into Charlie's "religious" quest for identity — with undertones of a martyr complex invested in his relation to Johnny — seems finally to arise from the same needs that define his struggle to prominence. Conscience and conservatism — conformation to the status quo of his moral and social environment — are joined together when fate is manifested as the economic imperative in Charlie's world.

Mean Streets begins by taking us through about three different layers of movie reality, structuring its world even before a "story" has begun to emerge. At first, over a darkened screen, we hear a character, Charlie, talking (or thinking) about redemption. As light filters into the frame, we see him raising himself up in bed, as though he has just emerged from a bad dream, indicating different, perhaps antagonistic, levels of consciousness and perspectives for viewing the world within the film. As he settles back onto the pillow, some early sixties rock music blares onto the soundtrack, and we see a home movie projector beaming light out past the edges of the frame. As the credits run, we watch shrunken, scratchy 8mm images in whose deceptive randomness there are clues to what will become important in

Mean Streets.

The focus of the scenes seem to be a baby shower; whose baby we don't really know (the name Christopher is written in deep red on a white cake). Spliced around shots of the baby are brief portraits of some of the movie's characters: Charlie and Theresa, his girlfriend, feeding each other pieces of the cake; Giovanni (Charlie's uncle) walking into the room, alone in the frames as he is isolated in the power and responsibility of his position; Charlie and Michael — a friend of Charlie who like Charlie is struggling up through layers of power and influence — goofing around out on the sidewalk in front of a car (an object that accumulates importance as the movie progresses), playfully edging each other out for position in front of the camera just as they will more seriously joust for survival out on the streets, where fates are decided. At the end of this sequence — and just as Scorsese's directorial credit is appearing on the screen — Charlie is seen shaking a priest's hand in front of a church. The gesture will develop a retrospective irony, since Charlie doesn't "trust" the church to expedite his salvation, but out of this image grows a whole metaphoric context of deal-making — the most visible manifestation of the



Charlie (Harvey Keitel) and his uncle Giovanni (Cesare Danova).

more abstractly moral and mythically imbued imperatives that govern Charlie's existence on every level.

The image of the newborn baby might entail a couple of things. It could refer to the personal nature of the film itself, a birthing (or rebirth) of part of Scorsese's own past. On a more immediate level, it initiates a motif of somehow interconnected geneologies, outlining a configuration of human relationships that is almost incestuously tight. Charlie must observe certain taboos imposed by his Uncle if he is to have a chance of moving up in the world; he must not get "involved" with Johnny Boy ("This Johnny Boy, he is named after me," Giovanni tells Charlie, "but he's crazy"), just as he must avoid Theresa, the daughter of people who respect Giovanni and seek him out for advice. Theresa has epilepsy; for Giovanni, she is "sick in the head," and hence not suitable for Charlie. Sooner or later, everyone, but especially Charlie, is answerable to Giovanni, a godfather-like figure reigning over the entire societal infrastructure of *Mean Streets*. The opening home movie scenes — a cluster of lives unified around an image of birth — thus suggests a kind of genetic interconnection between those lives, which in turn underlines a more visible vital form of economic interdependence revolving around Charlie's uncle.

After the credits have run, four brief vignettes introduces us to the main characters of *Mean Streets*: Charlie, Michael, Johnny Boy, and Tony. We watch Michael supervising the transfer of a shipment of what he believed to be German telescopic

lenses, but which he learns are "Jap adapters" that his client won't buy. Tony is seen entering the men's room in his bar where he discovers a junkie giving himself a fix; he tosses the junkie out into the street, recognizes the dealer who has just passed the stuff, tells him not to make dope deals in his place, and throws him out as well. Johnny Boy places a bomb inside a mailbox and runs up the street while we watch it explode. Charlie approaches an altar inside his church; he has just come from confession, a form of interchange he sees as pointless and hypocritical — ten Hail Marys, ten Our Fathers, and he is cleansed for another week. The conspicuous allusions to various kinds of transactions (spiritual as well as economic) soon evolve into more essential incidents linking certain characters. We learn that Michael has made a loan to Johnny Boy — a transaction on whose terms Johnny Boy is remiss. Charlie will act as a go-between, alternately soothing Michael's anxiety that Johnny's trying to make him look like a jerk-off, and trying to get Johnny Boy to own up to the responsibility of his debt.

The metaphor of deal-making, together with the sense of a closeknit, almost stiflingly familial arrangement of characters interacting on various social and economic levels, creates an inner climate of fatalism and entrapment and underlines the dead-ended structure of life inside Charlie's world. Individual fates hang together — only Tony, with his bar, seems relatively free of the pressure to "make it" — connected by the thread of economic necessity and

steeped in individual illusions of mobility. In short, the business of life in *Mean Streets* is business; violence exists as a kind of necessary by-product, a substratum of craziness (the "jungle") just below the surface of imposed order (compare, for an eerie resemblance, Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, where the same sort of eminently American duality is at work). Order and violence, twin defining qualities of the American way of life, are also essential aspects of existence in *Mean Streets*. Charlie, coming into Tony's place to celebrate the return of a Vietnam veteran, steps up to the bar and says, "I've come to create order." But Charlie is really a victim of order in *Mean Streets*, not its beneficiary.

You're inside there with your uncle; it's kind of embarrassing for me.

—Michael

Giovanni's indication to Charlie that he might be in line to take over the operation of a restaurant in the neighborhood is a turning point for Charlie. The restaurant, under the management of Charlie's friend, Oscar, is doing badly. Oscar can't make the payments to Giovanni, and Charlie asks Giovanni if there is some way he can help out. "Sure, you can help by waiting," Giovanni answers, and adds, "You like restaurants?"

The scene before this had taken place inside the restaurant itself. The way in which we see it suggests the tenuousness of Charlie's presence and influence within its space. The camera swings with rather awkward movements through the room, picking up the stray motion of a waitress passing through the frame, then almost clumsily tracks over to Charlie sitting at a table, waiting to talk to Oscar. Charlie's relationship to this environment is still unsettled, ambiguous. The second time we are in the restaurant, the camera again includes Charlie almost as an afterthought as it tracks through the room; this time, however, it brings Giovanni and his friend, Mario, into the frame along with Charlie, who is now beginning to move inside that sphere of power surrounding his uncle. The next shot even more dramatically fixes Charlie's position within the social hierarchy; the camera, in close-up on Charlie, moves slowly down across his face so that Charlie moves relatively upward in the frame — up onto a level of about-to-be-gained responsibility. He need only



Charlie contemplates the "William Blake" tiger.

"wait," as Giovanni suggests, for the inertia of ordered mobility to carry him into that niche of prominence.

The acquisition of the restaurant is the focus of Charlie's climb as well as his entrapment in the order of life that goes with increased responsibility. He looks to take it over as a means of gaining status and power, but only at the cost of conforming to his uncle's wishes, which in the end will entail his denial of Johnny Boy's trust. To a large extent, fate is a function of trust in *Mean Streets*, but the rules of the game that dictate survival tend to be at odds with the ideal notion of mutual faith. Thus, conflicting trusts arise — centrally, this bonds between Charlie and Johnny Boy (based on Charlie's spiritual needs) and between Charlie and Michael — the emblem of Charlie's fate, his struggle to make it: "Honorable men go with honorable men," as Giovanni tells Charlie in advising him to steer away from Johnny Boy. Charlie is not yet firmly ensconced within the ordered domain of his uncle's world; he still faces immediate threats, one of them being the possibility that Giovanni will learn that Charlie is involved in the deal between Michael and Johnny Boy — a very dishonorable affair. Michael's implicit challenge to Charlie's future becomes more obvious as Johnny's refusal to pay the debt widens the rift between them. After Charlie has been talking to his uncle inside Giovanni's cafe (a scene that provides a very literal spatial representation of the dynamics that link Charlie, Giovanni, and Michael — Michael motions to Charlie from the doorway, unable to intrude

into Giovanni's world) he comes outside to reassure Michael that Johnny Boy is not trying to screw him over. As Charlie walks away, Scorsese cuts to a shot looking out at Michael through the window of the cafe, the neon sign, "Restaurant," hanging directly over Michael's head. Michael is also among the upwardly mobile, fighting for position; if he isn't literally in line, like Charlie, for the management of a restaurant, he at least represents a threat to Charlie's own ascension.

The relationship between Charlie and Michael is significantly paralleled by the partnership and friendship of Giovanni and Mario. The latter are established in power; we see them almost exclusively within rooms, insulated from the struggle that shapes the futures of Charlie and Michael, who more often than not tend to meet out in the streets, or, in one instance, in front of a fight that breaks out with no visible provocation inside Tony's bar, a place of tension and violence as much as of friendship. But the implications of the parallel run much deeper than merely counterpointing achieved order and evolving power. A shooting takes place in Tony's bar one night. A young man walks into the bathroom and kills a drunk because the latter had allegedly insulted Mario. The next day, Charlie walks into Giovanni's cafe and overhears a conversation between Giovanni, Mario, and the kid's father. The father, trying to defend his son's actions, insists that, "An insult to Mario is an insult to you, Giovanni." The incident thus prefigures Johnny Boy's death and outlines the moral

significance of Charlie's part in it. Johnny's insult to Michael is a transgression that Charlie can't ignore; in the mythic context of gangland, the shooting which takes place in Tony's bar is an honor killing, necessitated, as Johnny Boy's death will be necessitated, by laws of behavior and a code of mortality that are the informing features of life in *Mean Streets*.

You don't fuck around with the infinite.
— Charlie

Beyond the conflicting thrusts inherent in the relationships with Michael and Johnny Boy, there is another, internal conflict in Charlie's quest for identity, a quest that is both economic and religious. Charlie and Johnny Boy, on their way home from Tony's bar early in the morning (just after the shooting), stop in front of the store owned by Charlie's uncle. Charlie suggests that they take some of his uncle's bread from a delivery sack just outside the door. It seems a very sensitive moment, a respite from the violence that has just taken place, but at the same time it serves to bring us back to the realities of power and the status quo. Giovanni controls Charlie. It is through him that Charlie seeks to gain both economic muscle and the "redemption" he sees as concomitant with making it in the streets (Charlie's opening words: "You don't make up for your sins in Church...you make up for them in the streets, where it counts"). Bread: money as well as sacrament. Charlie tears a piece from the loaf and gives it to Johnny Boy, the person he wishes somehow to save in order to win a little peace for his troubled conscience.

Charlie's concern with redemption, as noted before, is the very subject matter of the movie's coming-into-existence, its emergence first from silence and then from darkness. Its analogue is Charlie's looming consciousness as he breaks free of a dream and wakes into the reality of his cramped, half-darkened room. We got a clue as to what that dream might have been with the introduction of Theresa, Charlie's girlfriend. Still very early in the morning, Charlie and Johnny reach Charlie's apartment. As Johnny lies down in Charlie's bed to get some sleep, Charlie looks out the window, out across the space between his apartment and Theresa's, and sees Theresa undressing in front of her window. The camera slowly moves out



Martin Scorsese (standing, right), director and "hit-man."

beyond Charlie, until finally he is no longer in the frame; there are merely his words as he relates a dream he had. In the dream, he is standing naked over Theresa; they are about to make love when Charlie comes — "only I come blood." As he is talking, Scorsese cuts to a scene of Charlie lying in bed with Theresa in a hotel. Charlie's voice-over narration serving as the only link between the two scenes. The room is almost glaringly bright, the sheets of the bed very white, with sun streaming in through the open window; Scorsese jump-cuts continuously, imposing a temporal discontinuity on the scene, which itself becomes almost like a dream. The interconnectedness of Charlie's initial awakening with his dream of Theresa and the dreamlike lovemaking scene may provide another way to consider the opening "home movies" where Charlie's freedom to be with Theresa, denied in reality by Giovanni, is given brief expression in that 8mm celluloid illusion. The home movies thus create a dimension of dream and premonition — perhaps more accurately, dream *as* premoni-

tion — pointing towards both the tenuousness of the relationship between Theresa and Charlie, as well as the blood consumption of Charlie's and Johnny's ultimately ruptured brotherhood.

In the very next scene, as a matter of fact, as Charlie and Theresa are walking down the hallway of the hotel, Charlie describes the incident of the night before, telling how the guy who was shot "just kept coming and coming" after he'd been riddled with bullets. This also anticipates the scene of Johnny Boy's death when, after he's been shot in the neck by Michael's hit man (none other than Martin Scorsese), he just keeps staggering along the pavement, apparently not ready to die, but already cast as a mere shadow on the brick wall that lines some bleak alleyway. Indeed, the moral parameters of that honor killing have a way of determining the operative values in that function of fate and trust that links Johnny Boy, Michael, and Charlie. After Charlie leaves Theresa, he goes to his uncle's cafe and overhears the conversation between Giovanni,

Mario, and the assassin's father. While they discuss the implications of the killing, Charlie is seen inside the bathroom listening and washing his hands; his increasing awareness of his involvement in the business of his uncle's world, however, isn't rinsed away so easily. While the redemption Charlie seeks is closely tied to power in the economic strata of his neighborhood (the regenerative bread seen as money), to attain it he must accomplish the act for which he can never be forgiven: setting up the killing of Johnny Boy.

I can't let anybody see where I got the stuff. That's good business, you know.

— Michael

Early in the film — the first time we see Johnny Boy outside of the opening vignettes — Charlie has come to Tony's bar to hang out, have a few drinks, and talk with his buddies. After a few minutes, Johnny Boy walks through the door with two girls he's picked up; he's having a good time, clowning it up, flashing his underpants beneath a coat he's bought with money he should have given to Michael in



payment of his debt. Charlie looks at him and says, "We play by the rules, don't we?...You talk about penance and this walks through the door." The larger, perhaps metaphysical, reference Charlie seeks to contain and sanction his acts (the "rules" could allude to religious convention as well as to the kind of social behavior he has to observe in the course of his rise to power) provides a key to the way in which Charlie betrays Johnny Boy. Blind to the moral blunder of the gratuitous selflessness involved in his part of the friendship, Charlie does penance by bearing the burden of Johnny Boy. In the end, though, it is the rules to which he must succumb in order to win his own survival.

Mean Streets ends with a kind of mystery. The mystery starts when Johnny Boy threatens Michael with a gun in Tony's bar late in the movie, after Johnny Boy has let Michael know he never intended to pay off the debt. Michael and his henchman (Scorsese) back out of the room staring down the barrel of the pistol, Michael saying to Johnny Boy that he hasn't the guts to use it, Johnny taunting him to come back and see if he hasn't. After Michael has gone, Tony tells Charlie to take Johnny out for a ride in his car, to go to a movie and stay out of sight. "This is no good," Tony says, "you understand?" Charlie hesitates, letting the foreboding implications of Tony's question hang heavy in the air, then answers "Maybe." Johnny Boy looks at Charlie and says, "You got what you wanted." In those three lines, about three different planes of meaning and knowledge flash at disturbingly tenuous angles, intersecting in an unstated assumption underlying Johnny Boy's fate and pointing towards his brush

with mortality. It is the jumping off point for Charlie's realignment of moral purpose, the moment when he must choose between Johnny Boy and his own future.

There have been fairly clear intimations not only that Johnny Boy will die, but that Charlie, betraying Johnny Boy in his own best interests, will be ultimately responsible for his death. One shot during the scene in which Charlie and Johnny Boy enter the cemetery after Johnny has awakened the neighborhood ("It's dead," he tells Charlie) with a few wild blasts from his gun, lends credence to this idea. Johnny Boy is lying with his back on a tomb, and the camera looks sharply down on him past Charlie's profiled face, which hovers ambiguously above him, both mercifully (finally self-interestedly so, in the cause of Charlie's self-redemption) and threateningly. Indeed, the ambiguity contained in that shot is the center of the relationship between Charlie and Johnny Boy; Johnny Boy's "You got what you wanted" — spoken just after he has threatened Michael and sealed his face — draws together Charlie's feeling that he should "help" Johnny Boy with the implicit notion that he is merely fueling Johnny Boy's irresponsible nature and aggravating the self-destructiveness that will lead to the impasse with Michael.

But Charlie's relationship with Johnny Boy is merely indicative of his relationship with the world in general. Just before the gunpoint confrontation between Johnny and Michael inside Tony's place, Charlie had been joking rather maliciously with a woman at the bar. Her boyfriend comes back and tries to grab her away, telling Charlie, "This is private." Charlie replies,

"Nothing's private," a statement that seems to coincide with his initial claim that redemption is won out on the streets, not within the confines of the church. But privacy is an important quality in the final dealings that take place in *Mean Streets*. Charlie, Johnny Boy, and Theresa drive in Tony's car toward Brooklyn, ostensibly to "hide" Johnny Boy away for a few days until things cool down. When it appears that Charlie doesn't know where he's going, or that he's going the wrong way, he begins joking, fending off accusations that he's lost. "Do I know Brooklyn?" he says, "Do I know the jungle?" He drives onto a quiet sidestreet and Michael's car pulls up alongside; his hit man leans out the window of the back-seat and fires a round, hitting Johnny Boy in the neck and wounding Charlie's hand. There can be little doubt that it's no coincidence, that Charlie brought Johnny Boy to this spot to be killed; but that's a deduction we make — we were never in on any kind of arrangement made between Michael and Charlie for the meeting. It's a kind of transaction that *does* involve a privacy which may in turn imply an obscuring of Charlie's moral precepts (at the same time that it upholds the unspoken laws of the "jungle"), or at least the necessity of ignoring them in order to survive. The last image of the film — blinds being drawn down over a window — suggests the exclusion of an irrationally violent world (it exists regardless), but it also indicates the moral complacency that is a corollary to the achievement of power within the hierarchy headed by Charlie's uncle, last seen settling into a chair in some oak-pannelled sanctum of immunity and immutability.

It is also a closing off of that consciousness into which Charlie woke at the beginning of the film. Martin Scorsese, hit man and film maker, provides literal death within the film as well as the cinematic punctuation, the return to darkness. If Scorsese is, in a sense, killing off a part of *his* past and *his* creation, the stray shot that wounds Charlie, far from being accidental, is inevitable within the context of Charlie's and Johnny Boy's shared fate. Charlie's wound becomes the visible symbol of that otherwise private betrayal which is consummated, literally, out on the pavement where redemption is sought and where the rules that control life in *Mean Streets* are made to stick.



Jean-Luc
Godard
&
Jean-Paul
Gorin's

LETTER TO

RETOUR DE HANOI



Jane Fonda interrogeant des habitants de Hanoi sur les bombardements américains.

Deux Américains à Hanoi. Deux visions différentes. Le premier, Joseph Kraft, est un des journalistes américains les plus connus et des plus mesurés. L'autre, l'actrice Jane Fonda, est une militante acharnée pour la paix au Vietnam. Joseph Kraft est allé à Hanoi pendant une quinzaine de jours, au début de juillet. Son but : évaluer les chances de paix après les différentes initiatives diplomatiques et militaires du président Nixon. Sa conclusion : une solution politique est possible, mais peu probable. Jane Fonda est restée également une quinzaine de jours à Hanoi, invitée par le Comité pour l'amitié avec le peuple américain. Sa conclusion : les Américains bombardent les digues et la population. C'est un crime inutile, la guerre est perdue. L'Express s'est assuré le témoignage de Joseph Kraft et le reportage photographique de Jane Fonda.

L'EXPRESS - 31 juillet - 6 août 1972

Page 51
of L'Express for
31 juillet—6 août 1972:
from an article by
Joseph Kraft (reprinted
by permission of
L'Express).

Following is a transcript of the film **Letter to Jane** made in 1972 by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Paul Gorin to accompany **Tout Va Bien** on their college and festival tour of the U.S. that year. Though six years old, we feel that the film retains its pertinence; as William Cadbury suggests in the afterword, the film is damn good semiology. Excerpts have previously appeared in the regrettably defunct **Women and Film**, which helped us in clarifying certain passages. Nevertheless, because of the speakers' pleasant, but occasionally difficult to follow accents, this reconstruction will contain errors we have overlooked. Unclear words we have indicated with an (?). We recommend James Monaco's **The New Wave** for a brief discussion of the film. We would like to thank the following people: Dan Talbot of New Yorker Films for permission to print this text, as well as for stills; Dave Gettman of the Northwest Media Project; Linda Hartness; Julie Thorp; Susan Watts; and Monique Escortell and **L'Express**.

JANE

LETTER TO

GODARD: We found this photograph in an issue of *L'Express* early August, 1972, and we think it will enable us to talk in a more concrete way about the problems raised by *Tout Va Bien*. This is not a way of changing the subject, nor is it a way of not talking about *Tout Va Bien*, as if we were afraid of talking about a film. Not by any means. It is a way of not marking time, like the perfect — (?) at Grand Prix, which eventually leads to stepping on others, as with the — (?) of the seventh straight at Grand Prix. Actually this is a way of making a detour, but if we dare say so, a direct detour. In other words, a detour which will enable us to run directly into the treacherous list of troubles that the film we made together at the beginning of this year is concerned with. And rather than talk right away about the priorities and force of our film from one end to the other, we prefer to ask critics, journalists, and spectators to kindly make the effort of realizing this photograph of you in Vietnam, which was taken a few months after the film we did in Paris. As a matter of fact, this photograph and the short text that appeared with it, does a better job of summing up *Tout Va Bien* than we could, and for a very simple reason. This photograph answers the same questions that the film is asking: "What part should intellectuals play in the revolution?" To this question the photograph gives a practical answer. The answer it gives is its practice. This photograph shows you, yes you, Jane, serving with the Vietnamese peoples' struggle for independence.

GORIN: *Tout Va Bien* provides an answer to this question, too, but not in the same way, because, less certain than the photograph of the answers to be given, the film asks other questions first. And finally, these questions amount to not asking the question of "intellectuals and the revolution" in that way. How can this question be raised then?

GODARD: The film does not answer yet exactly. But the way in which it does not answer yet is actually an indirect way of asking you questions, because there is no use in giving old answers to the new questions that

are being raised by the development of the revolutionary struggle today. One must learn how to ask these new questions. And learn from those who, even if they haven't had enough time to formulate these questions clearly yet, have already taken possession of the ground where they will be able to grow and flourish (and they have accomplished this by inventing new forms of practical action).

GORIN: We're telling you that our way of not really giving an answer yet, like the Vietnamese and you in the photograph, was actually an indirect way of asking new questions. An indirect way, a deviated way. Now you can understand why we had to make a detour before talking about the film.

GODARD: And why it had to be a detour through Vietnam. First of all because everyone agrees about the fact that some really new questions are being raised over there, and secondly, because you were with them after having been with us.

GORIN: As we were looking at this photograph of an actress on the theater of military operations, that's what made us want to ask some questions, not to the actress, but to the photograph. And for us this means asking a certain number of new questions about a practical answer that the Vietnamese and you have given the well known question of the "intellectuals" by publishing this photograph.

GODARD: There is something else that has influenced our decision to take advantage of this photograph in order to make a detour through Vietnam. This something is our desire to have a real discussion about the film with the spectators, journalists or not. Everyone is his own journalist or editor depending on how he changes his own concrete, day to day activity into a film, making himself the star of this film. And it is precisely this kind of little star system that we want to talk about...to talk about with the audience. But in order to do so we must make a detour because, just as a film is a kind of 'detour that leads us back to ourself, in order to get back to the film we must first make this detour ourselves.

GORIN: And here in the USA today "ourselves" still and always means Vietnam. We will try and explain a little further.

GODARD: We think that it's important and urgent to really speak to those who have taken the trouble to come and see our film; "really" means right where they are. And also, right where we are. And so, we must find a way to enable them to really ask questions if they feel like it, or give answers to the questions we have asked. The spectator must be able to really think, and think first of all about this problem of questions and answers. We must be able to be really upset by the spectators questions, or answers, and to answer (or ask questions) other than with ready-made answers, or questions to ready-made questions, or answers. But ready-made by whom? For whom? Against whom?

GORIN: This means that in order to have a real possibility of discussing *Tout Va Bien* we are going to place ourselves outside of *Tout Va Bien*. To talk about machine [sic] we are going outside of the factory that uses it. We are going to find our basis for discussion outside of the world of the cinema in order to have a better view of it when we return, and in order to set out in a better way toward the real problems of our real concrete life, of which the cinema will have been only one of the elements. We are not going to leave right away for *Tout Va Bien*. We are going to go away for a minute out of the country, to go somewhere else, to Vietnam for example, since you have come back from there. But what is important is that we are going to travel there by our own means. What sort of means are we talking about? The technical means we work with and the way we use them socially, you in the photograph from Vietnam and we in the film in Paris. And we will be in a better position to evaluate the issues. And for one, we will not be alone. The spectator will be there too. He will be a producer at the same time he is a consumer. And we will be consumers at the same time we are producers.

GODARD: Perhaps all this seems complicated to you. As Vertov said to Lenin, "The fact is the truth is simple, but that it is not simple to tell the truth." And Uncle Bertolt has come up with five difficult ways of telling the truth back in his time. O.K., we will explain that another way. Today one often hears people say that cinema should serve the people. Fine. Rather than talk theoretically about the faults and virtues of *Tout Va Bien*

we are going to Vietnam, but we are going there by and with the means of *Tout Va Bien*. We are going to see if one may use the expression that way, how *Tout Va Bien* is working in Vietnam. And then, from this practical example we eventually will be able to draw a few conclusions about what to do and what not to do, each of us right where he is, with his wife, his boss, his children, his money, his eyes, etc. We are going to use this photograph, then, to go and seek an answer to the following question in Vietnam: How can cinema help the Vietnamese people win their independence? And as we have already said several times we are not the only ones who have used this photograph to go to Vietnam. Thousands of people have already done so. Probably most...probably almost everyone here has already seen this photograph and for a few seconds each in his own way has used it to go to Vietnam. That is precisely what we think is important to know: how each one has used this photograph to go to Vietnam; in actual fact how he has gone to Vietnam (because Dr. Kissinger goes to Vietnam too, several times a year).

GORIN: And it is precisely someone like Dr. Kissinger who is going to ask us, "Why this photograph?" and what connection this photograph has with *Tout Va Bien*. And he and his friends will tell us that we are mixing things up or just playing around, that we would be better off getting down to some serious talk about the film, about art, etc. But one must make the effort to see how this kind of remark contradicts itself when it is made that way. That's confusing the real issue and blocking access to other questions of a more simple nature, simple as might be asked by ordinary folk. For instance, before saying "what connection?" one must first ask, "is there any connection?" And if so then one may ask, "which one?", and then having discovered which connection we will discover a little further on that the connection between our film and this photograph is in the problem of expression. We will eventually be able to judge how important it is, which means making other connections with other important answers. People will say that all this sounds like empty words, that already at the other end of this new little assembly line of questions, the question of what is important (that we

try to call the question of practical result) is beginning to look like an extraordinary question.

GODARD: And this is because the North Vietnamese-Viet cong collective has already answered the question of whether or not this photograph is important; that succeeding in having it published in just about every corner of the free world, the same free world that is holding them in chains, and it's shown what importance it gave to this photograph, the importance it gave to the question of what is important. This photograph is therefore a practical answer that the North Vietnamese have decided to give, with your help, Jane, to the well-known question we asked earlier: "what part should the cinema play in the development of the revolutionary struggle?" or in other words, "how should intellectuals take part in the revolution?" The photograph gives the practical answer to this question, the answer for the whole people. The photograph has been taken and published, and it has been taken in a certain way to make sure that it would be published both on the right and on the left, and this is what has happened, obviously, otherwise we would not have obtained it. *Tout Va Bien* answers this question, too, but from somewhere else, and in another way, the way in fact, of not being too quick to give these kinds of answers, the way that is a means of saying, here in France, where we are, in 1972, ruled by the friends of the Americans and the Russians, everything is not so clear. Everything is not so obvious. Fidel Castro said at the U.N. that for revolutionaries, there are never any obvious truths, that they are an invention of imperialism and that those who are big use obvious truths cleverly to oppress those who are small.

GORIN: And since everything is not obvious, Jane, let us continue asking ourselves questions, but let... let us make an effort to ask them differently. In other words let us ask new questions in order to be able to give new answers. For example, let us observe how the Vietnamese express their struggle. Let us ask ourselves some questions since we wish to express ourselves too. And first let us ask ourselves honestly, what makes us able to say that we are really struggling. But at this point perhaps you, Jane, will ask us, "Why this photograph of

me, and not one of Ramsey Clark, for example. He was in Vietnam too? And he also witnessed the bombing of the dykes." Simply Jane, because of *Tout Va Bien* and because of your social rank in the film was the same as in this photograph. You're an actress. We're all actors in this stage of history. But what's more, you work in film, and so do we. Then why not Yves Montand in Chili, you could say? He was also in the movie, true. But it so happens, that the Chilean revolutionaries — (?) did not judge that it would be a good thing to publish photos of Yves, whereas the Vietnamese revolutionaries did judge, with your agreement, that it would be a good thing to publish photographs of you. In fact, to publish photographs of your agreement with the Vietnamese struggle.

GODARD: There is another problem too, and one that we can't avoid. We are both men who have made *Tout Va Bien* and you are a woman. In Vietnam the question is not put that way, but here it is. And as a woman you undoubtedly will be hurt a little, or a lot, by the fact that we are going to criticize a little or a lot your way of acting in this photograph, hurt because once again as usual men are finding ways to attack women. If for no other reason we hope that you will be able to come and answer our letter, by talking with us as we go reading it in two or three places in the U.S. In the U.S. and in Europe, it's true that things are still or have already become that way, and we are, as you, submerged in some pretty troubled water through which this photograph can help us to see clearly. This is where we have to start from, from you in the U.S., from us in Paris, from you and us in Paris, from you in Vietnam, from us in Paris looking at you in Vietnam, from us going to the U.S. And from everyone in the theater here listening to us, and looking at you. We are starting from all this. It is organized in a certain way and functions in a certain way. We want to discuss it all starting from there. To start from *Tout Va Bien* and go to Vietnam, to come back to *Tout Va Bien*; in other words to come back to Vietnam in the theater where *Tout Va Bien* is being shown and afterwards to go back home and tomorrow to go back to the factory. In order to discuss all that, we are slipping this photograph under peoples' noses for a second look since the Vietnamese and you already slipped it there once. In

other words we ask and we are asking ourselves, "Did we really look at this photograph?" What did we see in it? And beneath each question we discover another question, for example: how did we look at this photograph? And what makes them glance that way instead of another? And still another question, "What makes our voice interpret this glance in a certain way instead of another?"

GORIN: *Tout Va Bien* asks all of these questions. These questions can all be summed up in the big question of "the role of the intellectuals in the revolutionary struggle." Or rather this big well known question about "intellectuals," one begins to see that, by expressing itself in that way, it becomes paralyzing and that it paralyzes others. And finally, that it is no longer a question belonging to the revolution. To these questions about the revolution as we will discover, in relation to the photograph (then in relation to the film) should be: how to change the old world; and one can see right away that the old world of the Viet Cong is not the same as the old world of the western intellectual, that the old world of the Palestinians is not the same as that of a black child from Harlem, that the old world of the worker from the Renault factory is not the same as that of his girlfriend. One can see that this photograph is a practical answer to the question of changing the old world and therefore we are going to examine this photographic answer. We're going to make an investigation. We're going to look for some clues. We're going to analyze and put them together. We will try to explain the organization of these elements that make up this photograph. On the...on the one hand we will explain things as if we were dealing with a photographic molecular structure and on the other hand, as if we were dealing with a kind of social nerve cell. Then we will try to show the connection between the scientific investigation and the more political one.

GODARD: Where do the right ideas come from? From the struggle for production, from the class struggle and from scientific experimentation.

GORIN: In making this investigation, questioning this photograph, we're doing nothing other than trying to find out how the answers that this

photograph gives was [sic] produced by the context of the struggle in Vietnam.

GODARD: Then we will see the answer is entirely satisfactory for everyone. For whom? Against whom? And if perhaps other questions won't start cropping up, just those that *Tout Va Bien* somehow or other manages to raise. For example, as far as an important

GORIN: part of the photograph is concerned with the actress's expression, the relation between the eyes and the mouth. In western Europe, in our opinion, one cannot be satisfied with it for the same reason as its authors — those who took the photograph — decided it should be taken: the North Vietnam-Viet Cong collective (and this at first seems absolutely normal, the context being different). But then one ought to inquire, as thoroughly as they do, into what in society conditions this idea of what is normal.

GODARD: In saying this, we are not doing as most of the Communist Party and their allies in the western world (the Pope, the U.N., the Red Cross) who say simply, "Let us help Vietnam toward peace." Saying what we have said, on the contrary, is saying something much more precise. For example, let us help the North Vietnamese-South Vietnam alliance make its own peace. And even more precise, since Vietnam, in changing its old world helps us change our own, how can we really help Vietnam in return? And since the Viet Cong-North Vietnam collective is struggling, criticising, and transforming South East Asia, how can we struggle in our context for changing Europe and America. Of course, all this takes a little longer to say than just "Peace in Vietnam." And it necessitates doing things more thoroughly than just creating two or three Vietnams. And that's why Marx, in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, was asking for readers who were not afraid of minute details in order to overthrow the king of Hell and free all these smaller devils. Faced with this photograph a few months ago by you, Jane, and the Vietnamese, and now by us again, each person can, if he is willing, make his own investigation. Then we will be free to compare the results and we will be able to speak without taking the desire to speak away from those who are listening. Perhaps we will be able, just

for a moment, to say a little less nonsense about ourselves and the revolution.

GORIN: And one more thing, so that you won't feel attacked personally; although we can't really avoid it, we feel the question is badly put. But we hope that by the end of this letter things will be a little clearer and that's why we really need you to come and answer us directly, because we're writing to you not only as authors of *Tout Va Bien*, but also because we have been looking at this photograph. And you must admit that this is the first time anyone who has seen a photograph of you in a magazine writes to you about it this way. So that you won't feel like our chosen victim, as they say, and so that you'll understand that we're not aiming at Jane, but at the function of Jane, when questioning this photograph we will refer to you in the third person. We won't say "Jane has done such and such", we'll say "the Actress" or "the Militant" (just, by the way, as in the text which accompanies the photograph). In our opinion, these are the principal elements, or elements of elements, that play an important part in this photograph which appeared in the French magazine *L'Express* at the beginning of August '72.

GODARD: Elementary elements. This photograph was taken at the request of the North Vietnamese government, representing on this occasion the revolutionary alliance between the people of South Vietnam and the people of North Vietnam. This photograph was taken by Joseph Kraft, who is described beneath the photograph in a text which was not written by those who were responsible for taking the photograph, but by those who have published it; in other words, a text composed by several writers from *L'Express* who have not made any contact with the North Vietnamese delegation in France. We checked that. The text describes him as one of the most well known and most moderate American journalists. It also says that the Actress is a devoted militant for peace in Vietnam. But the text doesn't mention the Vietnamese people in the photograph. For example, the text does not tell us that the Vietnamese who cannot be seen in the background is one of the least known and least moderate of the Vietnamese people. This photograph, like any photograph, is physically mute. It talks through the



Jane Fonda and Yves Montand in *Tout Va Bien*.

mouth of the text written beneath it. This text does not emphasize, does not repeat, because a photograph speaks and says things in its own way. The fact that the Militant is in the foreground and Vietnam is in the background. The text says that Jane Fonda is questioning the people of Hanoi. But the magazine does not publish the questions asked, nor the answers given by the representatives of the Vietnamese people in this photograph. In fact, the text should not describe the photograph as Jane Fonda questioning, but as Jane Fonda listening. This much is obvious and perhaps the moment only lasted 1/250th of a second, but that is the 1/250th that has been recorded and sent throughout the western world. Being written this way, the text is probably trying to tell us that the photograph was taken at random during a discussion where the Actress-Militant was actually questioning the people of Hanoi and therefore we shouldn't pay any attention to the detail of the mouth being closed, but we will see a little further on that it is not a question of chance or rather, even if it is chance, the chance is then exploited according to the logical necessity of capitalism — the necessity for capital to describe what is real at the time it reveals it. In other words, the necessity of tricking the customer about the product. Less elementary elements. Less elementary elements. The camera took this photograph from a low-angle. Actually in the history of cinema, this low point of view cannot

be considered an innocent one. This fact has been emphasized technically and socially by Orson Welles in his first pictures. The choice of frame is not neutral or innocent either. The frame is composed in relation to the Actress who is looking, rather than in relation to what she is looking at. She is presented in the frame as if she were the star and that in fact is because the Actress is an internationally known star. So on the one hand, the frame shows the star in a militant activity, and on the other it focuses on the Militant as a star which is not the same thing, or rather, which might be the same thing in Vietnam, but not in Europe or in the U.S. The following page shows photographs of what the Militant saw at other moments, but not what she was looking at in this photograph. As far as we're concerned these are the same type of pictures that now flow automatically through the channels of TV and newspaper publications in the free world. Pictures that we have seen hundreds of thousands of times, as many as there have been bombs and that don't change anything except for those who are struggling to organize this flow in a certain way — their way — the Seven Points of the GRP. The truth is, if this photograph had been presented by some Miss Jones or Smith, we think the same newspapers would have refused it then as too ordinary. Ordinary, one must admit, just as it has become a very ordinary thing for an agricultural community situated just outside of Hanoi to

rebuild its schoolhouse for the 20th time after the phantoms of Kissinger have destroyed it. But of course no one is going to talk about this extraordinary-ordinary fact, neither the Militant being given star-treatment nor *L'Express*.

GORIN: Neither will anything be said about what the American Actress and her sisters, the Viet Minh actresses that one can see in the photographs on the next page, have said to each other. Did the American Actress ask about acting in Vietnam, or how someone who acts in Hollywood can act in Hanoi knowing he must return to Hollywood? *L'Express* doesn't mention anything about all that. And we think this is because the American Actress doesn't talk about it either. It's true that the Militant talked about the anti-personnel bombs and the dykes, but one must not forget that the Militant is also an actress, whereas, the Russell Tribunal and Ramsey Clarke, for example, are not. We think that one must realize that because she is an actress, the officials in the White House will have no difficulty, if no one tries to stop them, saying that the Actress has more or less unconsciously played into the enemy's hands and that she is just reciting a text that she has learned by heart. Such criticism can easily destroy all the efforts of the Actress and the Militant. And one must understand why she remains vulnerable to this kind of attack. We think in this case it is because the Actress-Militant did not refer to the dykes by using an example such as that of the Vietnamese actress who works to fill in the holes in the dykes and then acts in a theatrical representation in the village that is threatened by the breakings of the dykes. In relation to this we believe that if the Militant considered herself first of all as an actress, and the Vietnamese were making use of her do on their level, she could begin to play a part historically, otherwise than in Hollywood. Perhaps the Vietnamese do not have a direct need for this yet, but the Americans probably do and therefore indirectly, the Vietnamese do, too. Once again we find the necessity of making a detour — the Vietnamese are obliged to make a detour — through the USA.

GODARD: In this photograph, in this reflection of reality, two people are seen facing the camera. The others have their backs turned. Of the two people, one is in sharp focus and

the other is not. In this photograph, the famous American is sharp and clear and the anonymous Vietnamese is blurry and unclear. But in reality, it is the American Left that is blurry and out of focus, and the Vietnamese Left that is exceptionally sharp and clear. In reality, it is also the American Right that is always exceptionally sharp while the Vietnamese Right, the Vietnamization, is becoming less and less clear. What should we think then of the moderation of Joseph Kraft who took a moderate view of this contradiction, set the lens opening and measured the focal distance accordingly. It was all carefully measured as we have seen in relation to his choice of frame. And he intentionally set the focus on the star in militant activities in order to obtain a certain product, a certain ideological merchandise. And what's more with a deliberate aim in mind. Let's not forget that the processing of this product is directly controlled by North Vietnam; but its distribution outside of Vietnam is not. Or rather it is, but in a very indirect way, not to mention the feedback. This distribution is controlled by the TV networks, the newspapers of the Free World. And so we see that one of the moves necessary to complete this act of communication cannot be made by those who have planned it. Which move? Or is it a move in some kind of game? And who has the right to play? And who plays for whom? Against whom? At this point we find (and we will come back to it again later) that in examining the relationship between what seems sharp and what does not, in relation to the two faces in the photograph, we have discovered something quite unusual. The face out of focus is sharp and clear, and the sharp and clear face is vague and out-of-focus. The Vietnamese can stand being viewed out-of-focus because he has been in sharp focus for a long time in his everyday reality. The American is obliged to appear in sharp focus because the Vietnamese way of remaining clearly out-of-focus makes this inevitable. The American is obliged to focus clearly on his real lack of clarity. But nothing of that sort is said in the text. The general effect of this photograph emphasize [sic] that of another photograph of the Actress on the cover of the same issue of *L'Express*. This cover composition is very revealing if one is willing to see that a photograph can cover up just as much as it reveals. A photograph imposes silence as it

speaks.

GORIN: In our opinion, this is one of the working principles of the two-faced form, Jekyll and Hyde, principle and interest, that information-deformation takes on when it is transmitted by images and sounds in our epoch which is that of the decline of imperialism and of the general tendency toward revolution.

GODARD: The American Left says that the tragedy is not in Vietnam but in the U.S. The facial expression of the Militant in this photograph is in fact that of a tragic actress. But a tragic actress with a particular social and technical background formed and deformed by the Hollywood school of Stanislavsky and show biz.

GORIN: The Militant's expression was the same in the third reel of *Tout Va Bien* when as an actress she was listening to one of the film extras singing a text written by Lutta Continua.

GODARD: The Actress also had this expression in *Klute* as she looked at her friend, a policeman played by Donald Sutherland, with a tragic sense of pity on her face and made up her mind to spend the night with him.

GORIN: We can find this same expression already in the 1940's used by Henry Fonda to portray an exploited worker in the future fascist Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*.

GODARD: And even further back in the Actress's paternal history, within the history of cinema, it was still the same expression that Henry Fonda used to cast a profound and tragic look on the black people in *Young Mr. Lincoln* made by the future honorary Admiral of the Navy, John Ford.

GORIN: One can also find this expression on the opposite side as John Wayne expresses his deep regrets about the devastation of the war in Vietnam in *The Green Berets*.

GODARD: In our opinion this expression has been borrowed, principle and interest, from the free trademark of Roosevelt's New Deal. In fact, it's an expression of an expression and it appeared inevitably by chance just as the talkies were becoming a financial success. This expression talks, but only to say how much it knows,

about the stock market crash for example, but it says nothing more than how much it knows. That's why, in our opinion, this Rooseveltian expression is technically different from those that have preceded it in the history of the cinema. The expression of silence creates stars: Lillian Gish, Valentino, Falconetti, etc. Just make the experiment and have these faces look at a photograph of U.S. crimes in Vietnam. Not one will have the same expression although all of them have the same knowing look.

GORIN: Film equals editing of "I see."

GODARD: This is because before the talkies, silent films had a materialistic starting point.

GORIN: The actors say, "I am film, therefore I think, at least I think of the fact that I am being filmed. It's because I exist that I think."

GODARD: After the talkies there was a new deal between the matter being filmed (the actor) and thought.

GORIN: The actor began saying, "I think that I am an actor; therefore, I am film. It is because I think that I am. I think; therefore, I am."

GODARD: As we have just seen in this experiment (which elaborates Kuleshov) before the New Deal expressed itself, each star of the silent screen had his own individual expression and the wide popularity of silent movies was a real fact. On the contrary, as soon as films began to talk like the New Deal, each actor begins to speak the same thing. Just make the same experiment with any big star from the world of cinema, sports, or politics.

GORIN: I think therefore I am.

GODARD: I think therefore I am.

GORIN: I think therefore I am.

GODARD: I think therefore I am.

GORIN: I think therefore I am.

GODARD: I think therefore I am.

This expression that says it knows a lot about things...this expression that says it knows a lot about things, that says no more and no less, is an expression that doesn't help one...is an expression that doesn't help one to see more clearly into one's personal problems; to see how Vietnam can shed some light on them for example.

GORIN: So why be satisfied with it and say, "It's better than nothing — something gets across a little," as in the union speech in *Tout Va Bien*, reel 3, or in the C.P. speech in *Tout Va Bien*, reel 5.

GODARD: And why, even if the Actress is not capable of acting differently yet; and even if we are not yet able to help her...to help her act differently as we would like to be, why should the Vietnamese be satisfied with it. In our opinion, we'll risk doing them more harm than good by producing a good conscience for ourselves in such a cheap way. Scientifically speaking, the movement from life to information is cheap. After all, this expression is also addressed to us — we who making an effort to look at it a second time. These eyes and this mouth are not saying anything to us. And for us, they are filling themselves with emptiness, like those of the Czechoslovakian children in front of the Russian tanks.

GORIN: Or the swollen little bellies from Biafra or Bangla Desh. Or the Palestinian fleet carefully looked after in the mud by the U.N.: full of emptiness, full of empty meanings. But watch out only for capitalism, because capitalism knows how to fuck things up and fill the real eyes of its future enemies with emptiness, forcing them to look nowhere.

GODARD: How can one fight against this situation? Not by banning the publication of this kind of photograph. One would have to stop all these TV and radio programs in practically every country in the world as well as the publication of practically every form of newspaper which would be token. No. But one could publish them differently and it is in relation to this difference, because of their financial and cultural influence, that the stars can play an important role, a very "heavy" role as they say. And the real tragedy is that they don't know how to play this heavy role.

GORIN: How can one learn to play it. Many questions must still be asked in Europe and the United States before one can answer clearly.

GODARD: We are asking a few in *Tout Va Bien* as Marx did in his day by taking German ideology and raising the question of the misery of philosophy against Proudhon who only knew how to philosophize about misery.

GORIN: If one looks carefully at the Vietnamese behind the Actress, one realizes very quickly that each face is expressing something entirely different than that of the American Militant. But even if one can't see what he's looking at, one can see that each face reflects what he must face every day — anti-personnel bombs, broken dykes and the torn bodies of the torn women, the house which must be rebuilt for the nth time, the hospital and a lesson to be learned. Lenin said, "First lesson: Learn. Second lesson: Learn. Third lesson: Learn." And this face immediately reflects a day to day struggle for a very simple reason. It's not just the face of a revolutionary, but of a Vietnamese revolutionary. The long past of struggling has been written on this face by French, Japanese and American imperialism. In fact, this face has been recognized for a long time now throughout the world as the face of revolution even by his enemies. Let's not be afraid of words. This is a face that has already won the independence of its own code of communication. Today, no other revolutionary face reflects as much daily struggle as this, simply because no other revolution except the Chinese has made as long a march as the Vietnamese revolution. Let's make the experiment.

GODARD: This black man for example. We cannot say right away why he's struggling or where and how: In Detroit on the assembly line of the Chrysler Corporation for better wages and a slightly slower workrate; in Johannesburg to have the right to enter a movie house where white people are showing white people films.

GORIN: And this worker.

GODARD: And this European girl.

GORIN: And this Arab.

GODARD: And this young radical.

GORIN: As Uncle Bertolt said, one must have the courage to say that we have nothing to say about these faces unless there is a caption with some sort of nonsense or lies that we can swallow. And one must have the courage to admit one's weakness and failure for one has nothing to say.

GODARD: This Vietnamese face on the contrary needs no words written underneath. Anywhere in the world people will say this man is Vietnamese and the Vietnamese people

are fighting to kick America out of Asia. Let's look, on the other hand, at the face of the American Actress without the rest of the photograph. One can see right away that it doesn't reflect anything, or rather, that it only reflects itself. But a self that is nowhere, lost in the infinite immensity and immortal tendons of the Pieta by Michaelangelo; a woman's face that does not reflect other women. The Vietnamese face was a function reflecting reality, whereas, the American's face is a function that only reflects a function. A face that could also belong to a hippie needing a fix, to a student in Eugene, Oregon whose favorite runner, Prefontaine, just lost the Olympic 5,000 meters, to a young girl in love who has just been dropped by her boyfriend, and also to a militant in Vietnam. It's too much. There is too much information in too small an element of space and time. At the same time we are sure that the Militant is thinking of Vietnam — and not sure at all, because she might be thinking of something entirely different as we have suggested. Therefore we must eventually ask the question why is this photograph of a Militant Actress who is not necessarily thinking of Vietnam being published precisely in place of that of an Actress-Militant who is necessarily thinking of Vietnam. Because the true reality of this photograph lies in just this: A star disguised, unveiled by the absence of Max Factor. But *L'Express* doesn't say anything about this, because that would be starting the revolution in journals. It would be the beginning of revolution to say in Europe and the U.S. that today it is not possible to take a photograph of someone thinking of something — Vietnam, fucking, Ford Motors, factories, sand on the sea-shore, etc.

GORIN: Perhaps people will say we should not have isolated this part of the picture from the rest since it was published as part of a whole, but we think this is a very bad argument. We have isolated this part to show that it already stands alone in fact and the tragedy is in this solitude. If we have been able to separate this face from the rest of the picture, it is because the face lends itself to this separation.

GODARD: Whereas the Vietnamese face, on the contrary, remains a part of its surroundings even if we try to look at it alone. It has a definite reverse shot.

GORIN: On the contrary, here, there is no reverse shot possible.

GODARD: No reverse shot.

GORIN: In France, we are very familiar with the expression used by the Actress in this picture.

GODARD: It's a working model of Cartesian thought process. I think, therefore, I am — the same that inspired the statue of that thinker by Rodin. Why not carry this statue around wherever there is a catastrophe in the world to inspire the crowds with a feeling of pity?

GORIN: The swindle of capitalist art and humanism would be exposed immediately. One must realize that stars are not allowed to think. They are only social functions. They are thought and they make you think.

GODARD: One just has to look at the acting of Big Thinkers, like Marlon Brando or any other motherfuckers to understand why capital needs this sort of art; to reinforce the strengths of idealistic philosophy in its fight

GORIN: against the materialist philosophy of Marx, Engles, Lenin and Mao who represent their peoples.

GODARD: We've said that we are able to isolate, on the contrary, the face of the American Actress. Now we are going to isolate the expression of the country in this sentence — isolate, separate. Lenin said that a revolutionary kind of separation is needed to fight against the way capitalism separates workers into isolated categories. The face of the American Militant and that of the North Vietnamese are opposites. The struggle of opposites is precisely what is happening in the imaginary reality of this image. The American eye in Vietnam is satisfied with just reading the word "horror." The Vietnamese eye sees the reality of America in all its horror.

GORIN: In this scene, the Vietnamese just appears in the background like a film extra, but behind him we can already feel the force of the astonishing, incredible machine built by the North Vietnam-Viet Cong Collective.

GODARD: And standing behind the star we can see and sense the vile and deadly capitalist machine



Yves Montand in *Tout Va Bien*.

looking full of cynical humility and linked with confusion, as Lelouch said in, *Adventure is Adventure*(?). In all of this we find a struggle between what still is and what already is; the fight between the old and the new.

GORIN: The struggle which does not limit itself to the taking of this picture, but is perpetuated by the way it has been published and by the fact that people in this theatre are looking at it at this very moment, the struggle between the process of making a product and the process of its distribution depending on who controls the process, capital or revolution.

GODARD: Other elements of elements.

GORIN: The North Vietnamese are right in taking the risk of publishing this picture, or rather, they have their reasons for doing so. This picture plays the part of a small screw in the mechanism that has been conceived for developing their current military-diplomatic offensive. This picture is one of the 1,000 that the Vietnamese have given with their blood in answer to U.S. war crimes.

GODARD: You may have noticed, by the way, Jane, that the Viet Cong-North Vietnam Collective often publishes documents of their struggles, but seldom of atrocities.

GORIN: In this case, the North Vietnamese government has answered on behalf of its people and specifically representing the Committee for Friendship with The American People by calling on the services of Jane Fonda, which means asking her to play a certain part.

GODARD: And like what many Americans would have done, the American actress accepted to go to Vietnam and play this part. She went to Hanoi to help the Vietnamese revolution. Now, one must ask the question, "How does she help?" Or more precisely, "How does she play this part?"

GORIN: The American Actress at work in this picture is helping the Vietnamese people in their struggle for independence, but she is not only helping in Vietnam, but particularly in the U.S. and Europe too, since the picture has come to us in France as well. As we look at the picture here, then, we are freely obliged to ask: "Does this picture help us?" And above all, "Does it help us to help Vietnam?" Vietnam forces us to ask this question.

GODARD: Putting together some elements or some elements of elements.

GORIN: Neither *L'Express* nor the American Militant have made the distinction between Jane Fonda speaking (asking questions) and Jane Fonda listening.

GODARD: For the Vietnamese, in the present historical stage of their struggle, the most important fact about this picture is that Jane Fonda is in it. And in our opinion, it doesn't matter much for them whether she is speaking or listening because the silence is just as effective. The important thing is that she is there. But here in 1972 the most important thing is not necessarily the same. We must learn what determines this "necessarily." We couldn't help observing that the text beneath the picture was lying when it said that the Actress was speaking to the inhabitants of Hanoi since the picture plainly showed that the Militant was listening. And since we need the contradictory truth of this picture, and not its eternal truth, its also important for us to make the observation that *L'Express* is lying on every level. But we must also add that if the magazine is able to lie, it is because the picture makes it possible. Actually, *L'Express* takes advantage of, profits by, the implicit authorization of the picture to hide the fact that the Militant is listening. By saying that she is speaking, and speaking about peace in Vietnam, *L'Express* is able to avoid saying, "What peace," leaving this up to the picture alone, as if the picture said precisely what sort of peace was involved. We have proved, however, that this is not the case. But if *L'Express* can do this, it is probably because the American actress does not express a struggle as a Militant by saying anything other than, "Peace in Vietnam," and because she doesn't ask herself exactly what peace and particularly what peace in America. And if she doesn't ask herself this yet or is not able to, it is not because she still acts as an actress and not as a militant, but, on the contrary, because as a militant she doesn't ask herself questions yet about what new approach or style might be applied to her function as an actress both technically and socially. In other words, she doesn't consider militant activity as an actress even though the North Vietnamese invited her precisely as a Militant-Actress.

GORIN: And she's talking from somewhere other than where she really is, in America, which is what interests the Vietnamese most of all.

This is why she also covers up the fact that the most important fact about this picture is listening — listening to Vietnam before talking about it. Whereas, at the same time, Nixon, Kissinger, and the big band of — (?) are not listening to anything, are refusing to listen to anything at the Paris Talks. We must be able to examine this masquerade. And unmasking Nixon hypocrisy does not mean saying, "Peace in Vietnam," because he says it too and so does Brezhnev. One must say the opposite of what he says. One must say, "I'm listening to the Vietnamese who are going to tell me what sort of peace they want in their country." And one must say as an American: "I'll keep my mouth shut, because I admit I have got nothing to say about this. The Vietnamese must say it. I have to listen to them, to whatever they have to say because I am a part of South East Asia." The rest is just masturbating.

AFTERWORD

By William Cadbury

Six years later, the light has changed, and with it the perspective. *Tout Va Bien* was not a beginning but an end. It, not *Pravda*, was the detour, the mistake in the evolution of Godard's films, the tempting but mistaken solution, like the marsupial. *Letter to Jane* was not the throwaway, but the main attraction. Like *La Chinoise*, and like Godard himself on his visit to Eugene, Oregon, in October of 1972, we took it into our own Imaginary and identified there with what we projected onto its mirror. But while all we could see was ourselves, and all we could do was identify with that other into which we made ourselves, the films and the man were standing there like our mothers in that same mirror, giving us the chance for our own game of "Fort! Da!" for the institution of the Other and the constitution of the Symbolic.

Just so *La Chinoise*, a signifier denoting mistaken identifications, connoted thereby the Word, which, it insisted, "is what remains unsaid." Just so, Godard himself, an Imaginary signifier whose own two faces, towards ourselves as others and towards the Other itself, were beautifully articulated for us in the discourse of that visit. He was, as he said, certain that

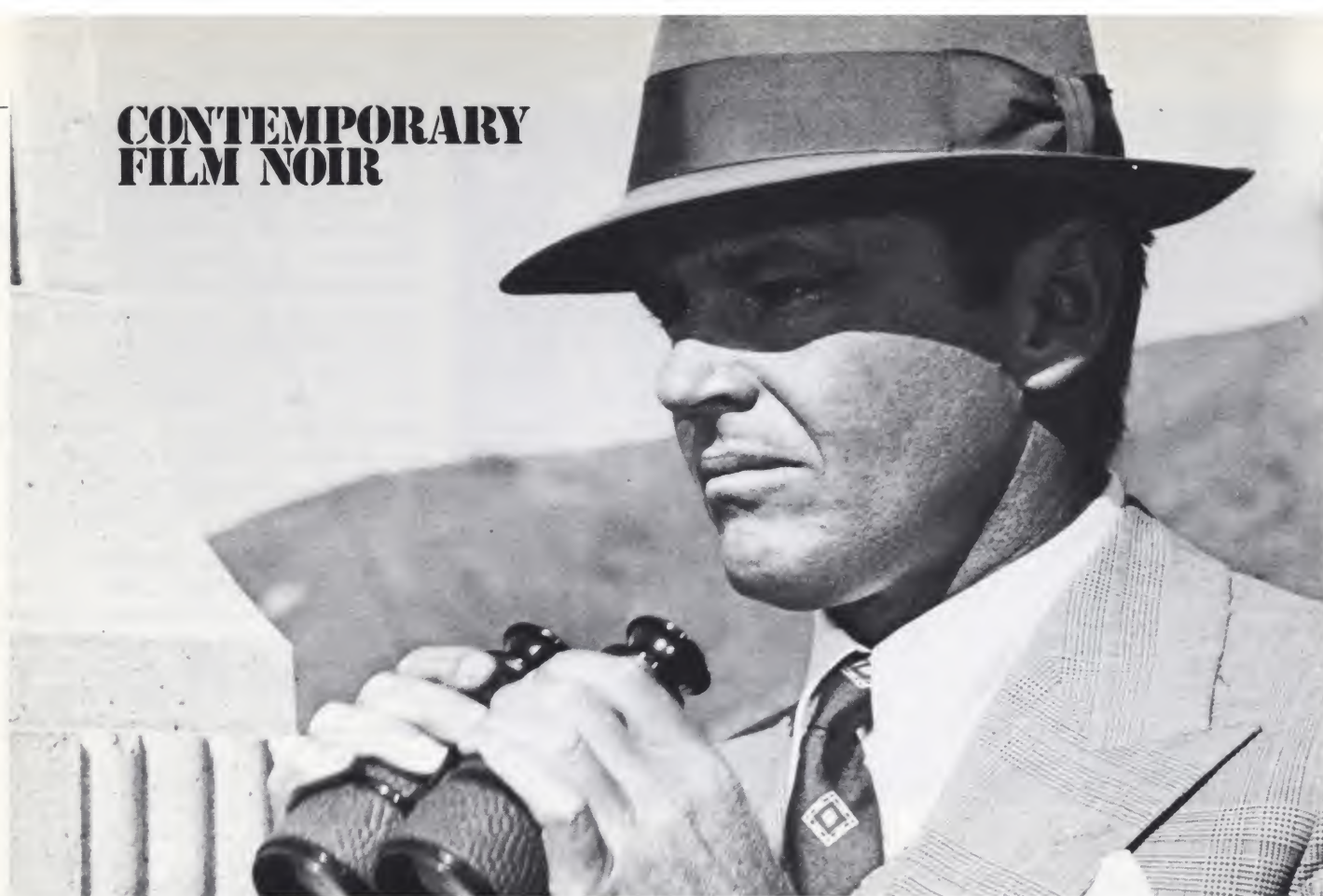
an American madman was about to rise from his seat in the Mayflower theater and gun him down — but what else brought him to the West but that fetishistic search for the gun which we (this time we to mother *him*, in a delicious doubling back on itself of the *stade du miroir*) have always for the French pretended not to have, yet by which our very lack, have confronted them, as do our mothers, with the promise of castration? We yearned to this Imaginary, and the comedy was sharpest in the students who kept asking again and again about their favorite of his films, *Two Plus Two!* But as well as his Imaginary and fetishistic probing of us there was the Symbolic, the absent presence of them, of the split ego, the subject become not the sad feisty imaginer of terrors, but the locus of the Other itself, the Dziga-Vertov group, one plus one, Godard and Gorin.

To grow up is to become a structuralist: that is the lesson of the transformation which Saussure and Lacan have worked on Freud, and of which we had the opportunity to catch the dimmest glimpses through the Dziga-Vertov presence and its film. The miserable castration-comedy of the celebrity-visit permits, like the mirror, the institution of both orders, and six years later it can be the Symbolic, not the Imaginary, which prevails. What did we even *know* then of the dialectic which led to the *Cahiers* reading of *Young Mr. Lincoln*, of Henry Fonda as the sacred monster, castrated and castrating, like the mother and the Law? How then could we have known what Jane *meant* to a Frenchman, she whose Imaginary had not itself been transformed into that network, that Saussurian web of difference which could have place for the paradigm of signifieds of the New Deal expression from the *Grapes of Wrath*, all commiseration and noble falsity, and the castrating stare of the syntagmatic partner of hers her father, before which Mormon brothers (one plus one) shrunk chastened, and before which the others of the mob dropped their log?

The reproach of the Dziga-Vertov *Letter*, then, was to an economic and semiological childhood, a presumption of Imaginary presence, an absence of absence such as we, too, were exhorted to remedy, by it and by them. The riches of such detachments remain when the comedy of identifications passes.



CONTEMPORARY FILM NOIR



QUESTING IN CHINATOWN'S MAZE

By Dana Benelli

The notion of quests is particularly germane to the topic of *film noir*. For while *film noir*, in the abstract, defies precise definition in any but the broadest of brush strokes (as a cinematic style, tone and mood expressive of a "dark" world view) there is remarkable consistency with which specific portrayals of the *film noir* experience fit within the category of quests for enlightenment (and, inseparably, death). Characters in *film noirs* repeatedly find themselves, or we see them to be, plunged into unknown and threatening experiential terrain. Their subsequent lives and identities become inextricable from their movements toward discovery of the full truth of their situation, world and fate. While a character's entry into the *film noir* realm is usually by chance (and fate) — in the course of selling an insurance policy in *Double Indemnity*, or having a drink in a nightclub in *D.O.A.*, or hitch-hiking across the country in *Detour* — the resultant movement toward enlightenment may be either consciously undertaken, as in *D.O.A.*, or unconsciously stumbled into, as in *Scarlet Street*. Still other characters undertake a search only to come upon much more knowledge than they bargained for (*The Big Sleep*,

Kiss Me Deadly). The fact remains, however, that all these lives have become quests. Further, these quests bespeak the utter transformation of their lives from the limbo of normalcy they once inhabited to a significant and meaningful, if also self-destructive, encounter with Existence.

The consistency with which the idea of quests appropriately and resonantly grounds discussions of the central thematic concerns of *film noir* makes it a useful (but still not an all-inclusive) tool by which to consider contemporary invocations of the *film noir* tradition. For while only frustration greets the effort to measure films against an absolute abstract *film noir* standard (none exists) we can make substantive observations based upon the comparative handling of this critical central narrative structure (where it is common ground). The effort in fact allows for at least tentative suggestions of how contemporary *film noirs* concur with and deviate from their "classic" precursors of the 1940's and 50's. This hope and expectation informs the following discussion of the "noirishness" of the quest in *Chinatown*.

As a detective, Jake Gittes is by definition an individual whose activity in the world is organized around questing. His job, his profession, consists of taking stock of reality, identifying what is going on in the world and figuring out why. He seeks the information others require, or believe they must have, in order to make sense of their particularized segments of the world and to act with effectiveness in it. We are introduced to Jake Gittes as he provides such information (pictures of reality) for his client, Curly. *Chinatown* very deliberately impresses upon us the vision-related dynamics of Jake's work through its recurrent shots of Jake at work, particularly while he is trailing Hollis Mulwray. We watch Jake watch and we note the tools of his trade (camera and binoculars) which contribute to his knowledge-gathering effort. Further, we cannot help but note that Jake Gittes is good at what he does; we witness for ourselves the cleverness of the watch and tire routine, the ease with which he gets photographs in the wide open space of the lake, and later, the idiosyncratic resourcefulness of a timely cough in the land registry office. The trappings of Jake's office also testify to his ability and security; Jake

Gittes is established and confidently at ease with himself and his world. Yet early in the film there are ever so subtly disquieting ripples in the order of what we see; there is Jake's slip while on the roof and the (surrogate?) brittle roofing tile that slides toward the brink; and there's Jake's "You're better off not knowing" advice to the bogus Mrs. Mulwray, suggesting that he is aware of the possibility that more terrible knowledge than a client is prepared for can come of a commissioned quest (we've witnessed Curly's painful experience with the photos. We should also note that in both cases Jake knowingly or unconsciously exempts himself from being affected by and implicated in the pain and danger latent within the quest at hand); and finally, there's the narrative tension of what's mysteriously unseen and unknown, yet sought and awaited, as Jake trails Hollis Mulwray.

In *Chinatown* seeing is not just a profession, it is also a means of survival. If unspecified danger underlies Jake Gittes's work then his ability to see well, and hence to know what's going on at a given moment, becomes his chief means of both functioning and defending himself. Against, and in spite of, the threatening, barely contained, forces latent in the world Jake Gittes's survival and security are based on his continued ability to see.

Yet such apparent ability and security are illusions; for all his watching, Jake is learning things he needs to know just a bit too late. He's taken in and made vulnerable in the world (his reputation is put on the line) by the bogus Mrs. Mulwray. He locates Katherine and sees her with Evelyn Mulwray and effectively knows as little as he did before finding her. Even more to the point is Jake Gittes's past experience in Chinatown. These past events, casting occasional shadows into the present narrative, serve as ineradicable signs of Jake Gittes's entanglement in a darker reality of terrible knowledge and experimental pain that can never be prevented from haunting everyday experience. We sense that in Jake Gittes's withdrawal from the police force, where he had no choice but to work in Chinatown (where you couldn't always tell what was going on, and where at film's end as once before, horror will come easily from below life's surface) he has attempted to construct a more tenable place in the world, a refuge away from the deadening reality he once inhabited.

The mistake he makes with the bogus Mrs. Mulwray, his failure of vigilance and clear perception, endangers the tenuous security of his present circumstances. The incident is not simply an affront to his professional identity, it threatens to undermine (and to expose as illusion) his escape from, and denial of, the knowledge he carries within him from his past in Chinatown. This



Faye Dunaway as Evelyn Mulwray.

is the stuff of *film noir*, the utterly perishable and ultimately inconsequential security of normalcy and the engulfing darkness which wells up within it oblivious of individual will. Jake Gittes has attempted to create a life for himself in which his abilities are a viable defense and denial of the weaknesses that cost him dearly in Chinatown. In a paradoxical way Jake Gittes, who quests for truth, does so in order to remain blind to knowledge that he carries within himself of his own fallibility, and hence, mortality. In *Chinatown* Jake Gittes's unalterable journey into the realm of *film noir* experience commences at the moment he encounters the real Mrs. Mulwray and as a consequence must commit himself to the defense of his breached illusory defenses.

As we have noted, *film noir's* elusive but distinctive, expressive essence is rooted in the stylistics of presentation of its narrative themes. This is particularly important in *film noir* for it is in large part thematics-as-defined-by-how-we-see that enlarges upon the scope of what we see in a particularized version within the narrative itself. That is, the style of a

film noir defines its encompassing world view more certainly than its unique characters and stories. We may be able to dismiss a character as a curiosity suffering an aberrant fate, but it is more difficult to dismiss a world view that structures and ordains such fate, with only a principle of random selection (chance) standing between us and the individual we watch. This

holds for *Chinatown* as well. The film weaves telling stylistic patterns that expand upon Jake Gittes's experience. While he is not necessarily an Everyman, the implications of his experience are universalized by virtue of the context within which we view both his individual quest and the end toward which it moves.

First of all there are understated, but intricately fabricated patterns of connective reference that provide layers of eventfulness within the film. Richard T. Jameson in *Movietone News* #33 (July, 1974, pages 1-12) considers the albacore and Chinatown references, webs composed, in the case of "albacore," of casual dialogue (by Curly), glanced insignias amid mundane decor (in Yelburton's office), misunderstood verbal fragments ("applecore") and concrete reality (the Albacore Club itself and Noah Cross's connection to it). Casual, inconsequential and ordinary as these instances are individually, they begin an ongoing pattern. This pattern once established becomes a cinematic context which alters our response to other moments which may or may not "really" be parts of this same design and the end it

eventually points toward. For example, our sightings of fish (rhyming with the Albacore insignia's fish) in Yelburton's office, in the photos of Mulwray, or in the meal between Gittes and Cross. The point is not that these latter moments "mean" something, but that there's a tension, a possibility, established merely by their echoing the albacore motif that does already, some-

ingful as it unfolds, and our associations with it can only be dark owing to Jake's finally identifying the place, even evasively, when he is with Evelyn Mulwray. "Chinatown" is "bad luck." But it is not chance bad luck. In the handling of "Chinatown" Polanski/Towne grab hold of another essential ingredient of the *film noir* world view, namely that characters are ultimately

significance to which he has no access); Jake is standing in, carrying on for a dead man, one who died for doing just what Jake is now doing. Seeking truth becomes as dangerous as knowing the truth, the experience Jake warns his clients about. Jake Gittes becomes linked to Noah Cross as well, in part by their contract and in effect by becoming a co-agent of Evelyn Mulwray's destruction. Perhaps the most chillingly *noirish* incidence of this kind of intention-and-morality-dumbfounding linkage comes in the bedroom scene between Jake Gittes and Evelyn Mulwray. It is significant that we are not privy to intercourse itself, which could well be casual for both Jake and Evelyn (if Cross's suggestion of her promiscuity is accurate, and we can have every reason to believe it is because Cross has no need of deception); what does matter in this scene is that it is intimate; in this regard Jake doubles as both the dark and the light men in Evelyn's life, Noah Cross, the father who didn't rape her, and Hollis Mulwray, the husband who lovingly cares for her and may or may not have slept with her. This terrifyingly ambiguous connection is underscored by Evelyn's response (her attempt to conceal her nakedness/vulnerability) to the news that Gittes has "seen" Noah Cross. Quite simply the nature of Jake's and Evelyn's encounter is thrown into absolute doubt in her mind; Jake could be the potential comfort, like Mulwray, which she seeks, or he could be an agent of Noah Cross's power which she fears. A potentially redemptive moment is lost, poisoned by the power of patterns of terrible possibility, patterns which confound individuals' perceptive powers — the flaw in the iris.

The confusion of moral poles that lies at the heart of the above doubling of the obsessed and the victimized is provided with some support by the film's handling of night and day realms, the dark and light, black and white worlds that Jake Gittes moves in. There is something of a *film noir* progression from the bright daylight of the film's opening normalcy to its conclusion in the darkness of Chinatown. More to the point of disordered "normal" clarity and easy separations of good and evil is the fact that the dark and light worlds of the film do not neatly separate. Certainly Polanski reserves the night for his own compulsively sinister appearances, but the tension accompanying events during



Gittes and cops at the site of water run-off.

what cryptically, exist in the film. When at the Mar Vista home for the elderly the fish pattern connects with Noah Cross's dark scheme and awesome manipulative potency, there is a retroactive flooding of the albacore moments with the terrible significance of his presence. And in this chilling recognition, dread spills over and infects our sense of the rhyming moments which may well have been peripheral and otherwise uninvolved. Our experience as viewers is of confronting something of only vaguely perceived form and of increasingly ominous potential even as the "evidence" itself remains, in large part, mundane. At this point, regardless of their "reality," they have become implicated, infected by the force Cross represents. We witness a loss of innocence by virtue of the "fault," other than existing in a corrupt world. This is precisely to the moral point of the film and the truth Gittes moves toward.

What is expressively tangential (though to the point) in the case of "albacore" assumes undeniably sinister implications almost from the start with *Chinatown*. This pattern we have more of a chance or recognizing as mean-

undone by a Fate which is inextricable from the order of the world and the fabric of everyday life. References to, and signs of, Chinatown may arise by chance, but aesthetically, in overview, they assume the dimensions of a pattern, a fixed presence in all that goes on. If references to Chinatown seemingly add only a slightly exotic flavor to a given moment, ultimately that moment will be engulfed by what was thought to be past, chance and peripheral (its connection to Chinatown). In retrospect Chinatown comes to evoke another of those entrapping *film noir* circles of Fate: Jake Gittes flees from Chinatown only to return to it again.

Consistent with these entrapping patterns is *Chinatown's* creation of linked and doubled characters (also noted in *Movietone News*). Jake Gittes observes Hollis Mulwray in the dry riverbed with the young boy and later he will take the place of Mulwray and speak with the boy. Narratively, and consciously, Jake fills the role of Mulwray the watcher, investigator, and seeker of truth. But aesthetically the linkage he initiates extends beyond his conscious intention (to levels of

the day bespeaks an unresolved paranoia of something getting loose in the world despite the light. Gittes's beating by the orange-growers indicates a lack of clear-sightedness and consequent panic on their part that attaches to the effort of staying alive in every moment.

At this point we have identified a stylistically derived, densely layered reality which encompasses, undermines and finally overcomes Jake Gittes. The world he moves in is treacherous and much of it (patterns in aesthetic forms) beyond his reach/sight. But the world so far described is bleakly fatalistic and in sum so unrelentingly black as to make it seem incomprehensible that someone as experienced and competent as Jake Gittes couldn't add it all up. Polanski's coup, his own personal contribution to *film noir* stylistics is to coat and saturate this world in the beguiling narcotic beauty of the film's cinematography. The effect he achieves is breathtakingly perverse — in retrospect. In looking back on the moment of viewing we are liable to find that we have been as negligent, or unavoidably ignorant, or as complacently blinded as Jake Gittes in the matter of seeing the truth. And we cannot grab hold of the easy out of having simply missed clues at the level of narrative, for the film provides moments of extra-filmic insight, warming, and challenge that test our ability to see and then hang onto the truth. Consider, for example, the infamous nose-slitting, a horror that suddenly materializes, unforeseen, out of the dark. It is something of a "Chinatown" for us, our first clear encounter with the forces that have lurked in the preceding tensions of the film and have been seen only obliquely, in terms of their effects (for example, Hollis Mulwray's body — a fish of sorts? — pulled from the water). In this moment, we see horror all too clearly — and then in the next moment a teasing rearview shot sets us up to fall for Gittes's absurd bandage and, in our amusement, forget the past (for this kind of cinematic slight of hand Polanski is truly dangerous). Repeatedly in *Chinatown* moments of danger melt into the syrupy Chanderlesque daylight and become obscured and forgotten even when they are not resolved. It becomes all too easy to go with the flow, nervous from time to time, but then reassured by the placid beautiful surface of things, the appearance of order and control. In a similar way we trust too in Jack Nicholson,

who is a gutty cinematic survivor and, as Jake Gittes, is not apparently concerned about being a half step behind in the race — after all he's still put lots of distance between himself and Chinatown.

When Jake Gittes knows that time is running short for Evelyn, and even

mired even as he tries to be free of it. (It is this buffering that prevents Jake, during the course of the film, from losing personal control and becoming himself infected by the raw vital energy of the *film noir* world as for example Bogart is tainted by the darkness of *The Big Sleep* and *To Have and Have*



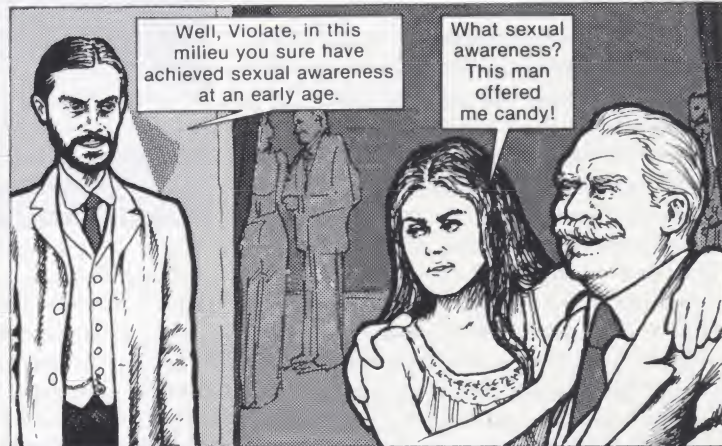
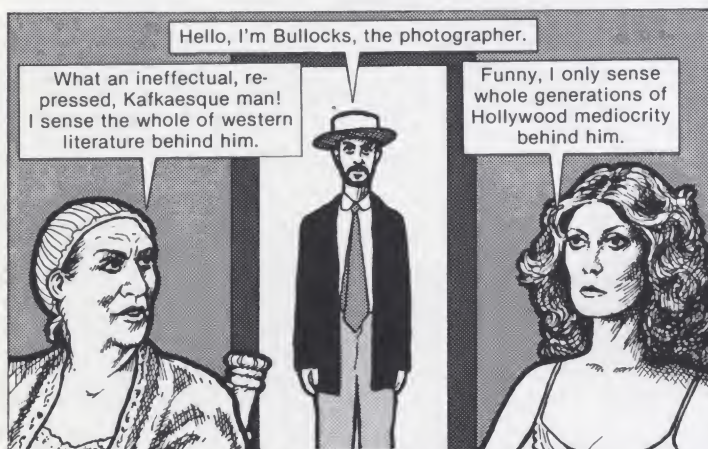
"She's my sister and my daughter!"

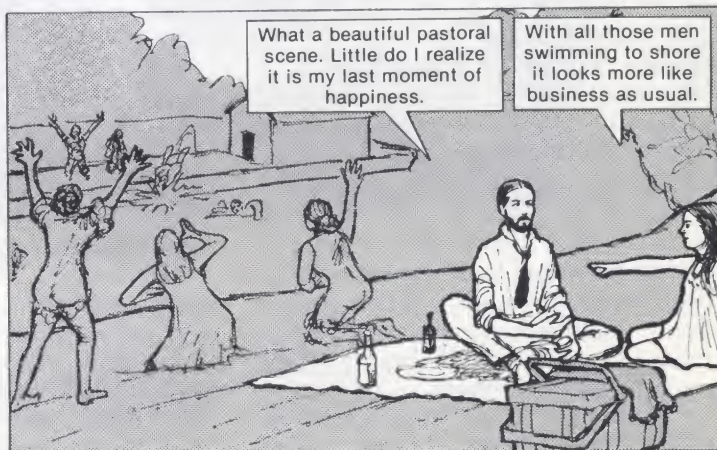
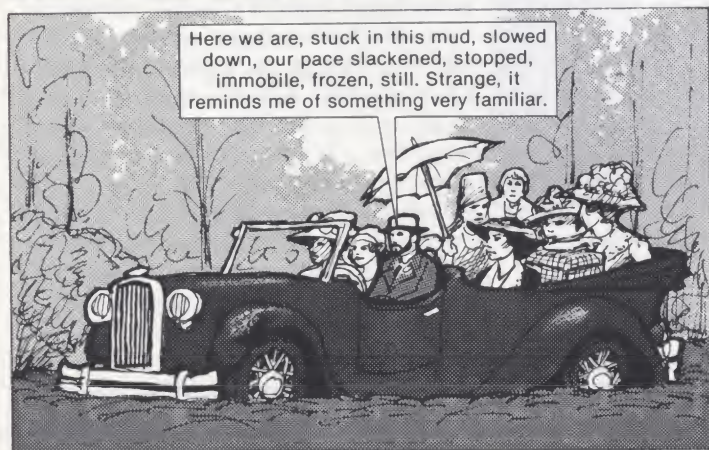
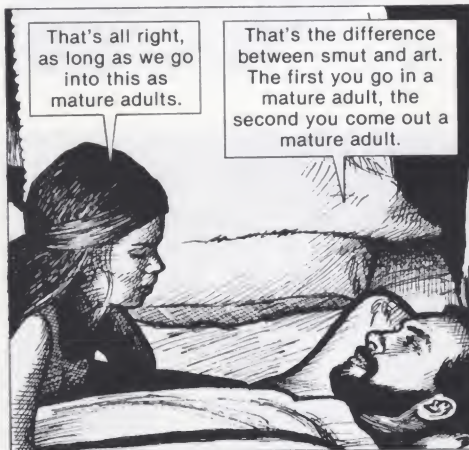
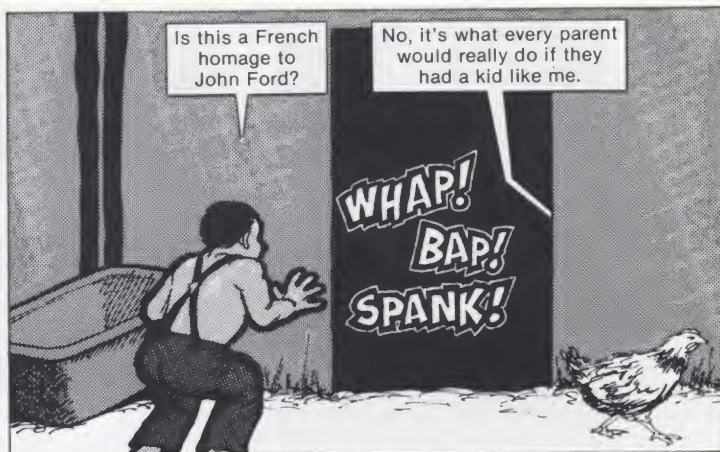
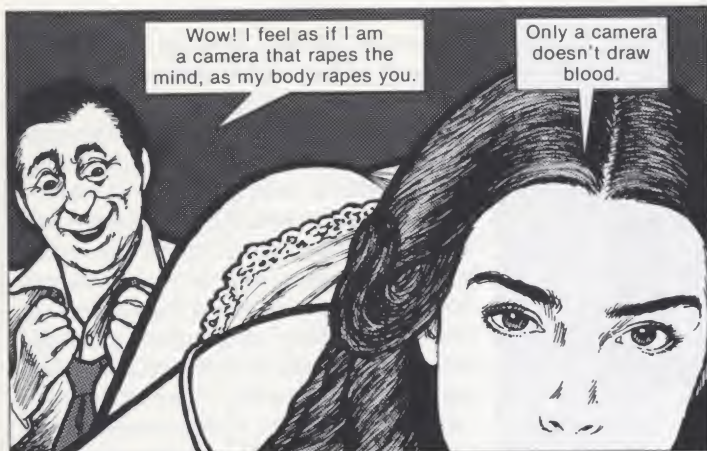
that his own path leads back into Chinatown (ominously dark knowledge of which he carries within himself, in his own past) he still mounts a poised and cocky escape via Curly's back door and proceeds with his plan to personally deal with and contain Noah Cross's threat. Perhaps he presumes that from Evelyn he has learned the worst of Noah Cross despite his not yet knowing the answer to the riddle of Cross's motivation (a significant and crippling instance of lack of sightedness on Jake's part). Certainly he acts in the belief that he knows enough (with the glasses) to still be able to control events, and by extension define, shape, and preserve the world he moves in and relies on. In any case Jake Gittes's illusory sense of self-confidence stands between him and the full force of the darkness in which he is

Not.)

In the end it's a shock and yet a reality we've been watching all along that confronts both Gittes and us as Noah Cross's henchman steps out of the black and into the frame (from a position right next to Jake and us) and effortlessly strips our knight errant of his power to prevent all hell from breaking loose in the next scene. The camera will crane up on the final scene as Jake Gittes walks into the black oblivion of the night. Wherever he goes he must now move knowing that "Chinatown" was no isolated accident and that any attempt to escape can only end in a return to this place where knowledge of one's existential fate is all too horribly clear. The search for truth or style that will provide release is utterly confounded by the world.









BULLE OLGIER

By Gloria Heifetz

An Appreciation

She has been called the "intellectual's Brigitte Bardot," though it is forgotten that BB herself was at one time considered an "intellectual's" sex symbol. This limits Bulle Olgier. Our responses to her as an audience, though occasionally sexual, are more diverse, and we must not say "intellectual" when we mean "complex." While she does not have the robust, zesty sexuality of a Bardot, her attractiveness is more poignant, drawing as it does upon a wider range of the viewer's desires, thoughts, dreams, memories. I cannot forget the fragile beauty of her smile in *La Salamandre*. I am moved by its life and spirit. And when one tries to talk about an actor or an actress words have a habit of returning to the physical. The camera likes Bulle: her bone structure, her petite teeth, the strong, aware squint of her smiling eyes. When Bulle as Rosemonde has the record player turned off on her by her room-mate because it will disturb the neighbors (who have complained before), Bulle rebelliously continues to shake her head to the non-music, the only sound the soft cacophony of clothing and moving bone. She refuses to relinquish her will, even though she is "wrong," which meets with a constant loser's-luck string of frustrations.

Sometimes for us the actor's body is merely beautiful, an art-work of pose and movement. Also there is tone of voice, inflection, timbre. It is good and we don't know why. A secret message is sent from her biology to ours. There is the funny, puppet's turn of head and "Oui, monsieur; oui madame," to the shoe store owners as they discharge her for (deliberately) stroking the thighs of customers sampling shoes and boots.

Her fullness of experience, then, and her vulnerability break our hearts, as in her jealous, complicated gaze at her husband as he dances with Jane Birkin in *Projection Privée*. There are so many Bulles, and any of them the director employs will be interesting: the rebellious teen-ager; the haunted wife; the wispy, ghostly actress in *Serail*; the ill-at-ease social outcast in *Rendez-vous à Brâty*; the kewpie doll bourgeois in Bunuel's film.

Often she has played the masochist. In *Piege* she is a thief just out of reform school tricked and betrayed by the gavialed-faced sadist of Bernadette Lafont and a lovesick male masochist and trap aficionado. He and Bulle die together. Baratier's film (which, according to Lafont, Lacan and his nouvelle Freudians got a big kick out of because of the sadomasochist theme) also exploits the idea of the house,

mysterious and huge, as do many of Bulle's other films: *Serail*, where the house has a sexual impulse of its own; and *Celine and Julie*, where the house contains instant-replay lives from another dimension. This is Poe by way of Paris. I'm sure budget has something to do with it also. Bulle is a victim, even in such non-erotic roles as hers in *Les Stances à Sophie* where she is the passive, fatalistic wife of a car fetishist (as Lafont has described the film), and the house serves as an encompassing, fate-filled deadend. If she is a murderess in *Celine* it is only so she may suffer more. Her fair complexion, her diminutive size, her clown's face solemnity, perhaps all lend her easily to victim roles. She does not have the cruel androgyny of a Dietrich or Garbo and her murderous role in *Celine* is meant to clash, not only with the physical gentleness of Bulle herself, but also with the historic association of blonde with good women and brunette with evil (in this case, Marie-France Pisier).

Consequently it is fun to watch her play the sadist in Barbet Schroeder's *Maîtresse* (Schroeder makes a wonderfully awkward and pale appearance in *Celine*). With a shocking black wig and tight leather outfit — her body is amazingly sensual — she performs make-believe cruelties, as well as some very real ones, on paying customers. The "role" of sadist is stressed by her being able to leave that role downstairs, while the upstairs, as in *Johnny Guitar*, is private, personal, "feminine." The sadomasochistic nature of her relationship with burglar Depardieu begins when she discovers him downstairs. But though Deleuze suggests that sadism and masochism are incompatible perversions, each creating out of the tendencies of himself in the being of another his alternate half, cannot nonetheless the two separate tendencies exist in the same mind? Bulle's previous film masochism is the obverse of Ariane's sadism, just as the opposite of the sadistic Ariane is the happy housewife Ariane Depardieu eventually rediscovers. In Sally Kempton's brilliant essay of detached personalism, "Cutting Loose," she deals with woman's "natural" masochism: "When men imagine a female uprising they imagine a world in which women rule men as men have ruled women: their guilt, which is the guilt of every ruling class, will allow them to see no middle ground. And it is a measure of the unconscious strength of our belief in

natural male dominance that all of us, men and women, revolt from the image of woman with a whip, that the female sadist is one of our most deep-rooted images of perversion." This has changed since 1970, when Kempton's article first appeared in *Esquire*. Now the female sadist is defused as a comic figure, or, conversely, the woman's movement is assimilated into sexual fantasy; in Germaine Greer's words, "Some cynics in the ranks of lechery hope that women, by way of taking the initiative, will become even more punctilious geishas, even less demanding sluts. Others dream of the liberated woman standing over them in jodhpurs and jackboots, whipping them for their unregenerate chauvinism."

Durnat has shown the close connection between masochism and the rise of romantic love. Perhaps as men, sensing the loss of the carefully built edifice of romantic love, from which, between men and women, they have more to lose, veer increasingly more towards romance as loss and suffering (women finding it a prison of a different sort) and hence to masochism, the rise of this tense topic in peoples' minds becomes explicable. What used to be a joke is now taken quite seriously; what woman has not been asked to play the sadistic role for her companion? On the other hand, as sex becomes demystified, its essentially playful nature comes to the fore, and sexual role-playing becomes fun, rather than a basket of depraved secret yearnings of the clammy raincoat crowd.

I don't want to give the idea that Bulle is just a "deviant's" movie star, but it is clear that her alternation throughout the years between roles epitomizing freedom and those investigating the workings of neurosis and slavery realizes certain tensions of the *zeitgeist*. After all, whenever I think of Bulle, the first image and the last to leave my mind is always the concluding shot of *La Salamandre* where, in such a grand contrast to the first image of her in the film, walking under the credits, grim, cold, separated from the water of the canal by the metal fence beside her, she now moves in slow-motion, oblivious in her exuberance to the people around her and to those who have oppressed her, rocking gently, gazing into the camera, her beautiful shy smile captivating: actors as beautiful animals; actors as being; Bulle just being Bulle. 🐸



Bulle Olgier and snake, from *La Vallée*.



A Partial Filmography of Bulle Olgier

Les Idoles D. Marc'O. With Pierre Clement.
Pierre et Paul D. René Allio.
Piege 1967 D. Jacques Baratier. With Bernadette Lafont.
L'amour Fou 1968. D. Jacques Rivette. With Jean-Pierre Kalfon.
Paulina s'en va 1969 D. André Téchiné.
Les Stances à Sophie 1970 D. Moshé Misrahi. With Bernadette Lafont, Michel Duchaussey.
Rendez-vous à Brÿ 1971 D. André Delvaux.
La Salamandre 1971 D. Alain Tanner. With Jean-Luc Bideau.
La Vallée 1972 D. Barbet Schroeder.
Projection Privé 1973 D. Francois Leterrier. With Francoise Fabian, Jane Birkin, Jean-Luc Bideau.
Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie 1972 D. Luis Buñuel. With Fernando Rey,

Delphine Seyrig.

Out One: Spectre 1974 D. Jacques Rivette. With Juliette Berto, Jean-Pierre Laud, Bernadette Lafont.

Marriage 1974 D. Claude Lelouch.

Celine et Julie vont en bateau 1974 D. Jacques Rivette. With Juliette Berto, Dominique Labourier, Marie-France Pisier, Barbet Schroeder.

Un Divorce Heureux 1975 D. Henning Carlsen. With Bernadette Lafont, Jean Rochefort.

Serail 1976 D. Eduardo de Gregorio. With Marie-France Pisier, Leslie Caron.

Duelle 1976 D. Jacques Rivette. With Juliette Berto.

Maîtresse 1976 D. Barbet Schroeder. With Gerald Depardieu.

Les Aventures de Holly and Wood 1978 D. R.J. Pansard-Besson.

Corrections and additions should be sent care of this magazine.

MIZOGUCHI

Two "Late" Films: *A Geisha* & *Princess Yang Kwei Fei*

By David Coursen

Although a film-maker as well-known and generally admired as Kenji Mizoguchi hardly qualifies as a candidate for "discovery" in the usual sense, it remains true that much of the director's finest work — even from his great late period — is not yet fully appreciated. Perhaps because the familiar masterworks, *Ugetsu*, *Sansho Dayu*, *The Life Of Oharu*, et al, are so widely known, other films have been relatively neglected. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this is *A Geisha* (Gionbayashi, 1953) a film so appallingly obscure that, until recently, no American film company even saw fit to distribute it. New Yorker Films's 1978 release of *A Geisha*, cause for celebration in its own right, is also a fitting occasion for a brief discussion of Mizoguchi, focusing on both the "new" film and on another, long available but occasionally overlooked work, *Princess Yang Kwei Fei* (Yokichi, 1955).

Mizoguchi's world is rich, complex, and, for his characters — trapped among conflicting needs and goals — often confusing. After early training as a painter, Mizoguchi, still in his mid-twenties, got a chance to direct his first film in 1922 when most of the staff at Nikkatsu Studio walked out to protest the hiring of women to play female roles. These biographical details are interesting since Mizoguchi's beautiful, precisely composed images provide a setting for some of the most fully developed female characters ever to emerge from the world's (male-dominated) film industry.

Most of Mizoguchi's films have either historical settings (often adapted from Japanese folk tales) or deal with contemporary women forced by social constraints into various forms of prostitution. *A Geisha* is a masterly summation of the contemporary strand of the director's work. It examines two women, Miyoharu, a veteran geisha, and Miyoe, orphaned at sixteen and anxious to become a geisha to escape the sexual demands of a gentleman "protector." The profession of geisha,

or hostess, is early described as part of Japan's cultural heritage, a "national treasure." One lengthy sequence recreates some of the training a woman must go through before she has mastered the profession that is also an art.

Against the elaborate formality of the geisha's rituals, costumes, and behavior, is the sordid reality that her foremost obligation is to satisfy her customers. In several early scenes, the conflicting obligations of the job are implied in the contrast between the professional dignity of the experienced geishas and the drunken crudity (stylized almost to the point of caricature) of the men they must serve. There is a peculiarly joyless quality to the revelry of the customers, no matter how skilled the hostesses.

From the film's beginning, Miyoharu's actions are constrained by personal obligations, of loyalty, friendship, and favors owed, as much as by professional obligations. In one strikingly evocative sequence, at a religious shrine, she is definitively caught in a vast network of formal obligations as her ostentatiously reverent boss asks her to repay a favor and orders her to do her duty. For Miyoe, less bound to the traditional ways, the sense of obligation is not so strong. With the uncompromising idealism of youth, she refuses to be reconciled to her pathetic father because of his early refusal to help her. Later, in the film's most powerful sequence, Miyoe violently struggles with a customer as he tries to rape her. But the violence in this scene — she is battered and bloodied, he knocked unconscious and sent to a hospital — is only a metaphor for the infinitely more decorous and ritualized, but equally brutal assault on the selfhood of Miyoharu taking place simultaneously as she refuses to accept a well-mannered but unappealing customer as her "patron."

The real force of these parallel sequences comes in the oddity of their aftermaths. Fighting off a customer/rapist is treated as a novice's professional indiscretion; the rapist remains a

valued customer, and the incident itself is even drunkenly re-created as a "joke" to the obligatory delight of several geishas. However, rejecting a patron, particularly one who might provide the wherewithal to repay old debts, is cause for ostracism and professional ruin.

Eventually, a series of maneuvers induces Miyoharu to accept the spurned patron, to do her duty and resume her subservience. Ironically, it is her very human feelings that make her susceptible to manipulation, by forcing her to place others' needs above her own. It is Miyoharu's tragedy that the very qualities that make her admirable also make her vulnerable.

The conflict between obligations is timeless and irreconcilable. It is in the nature of social institutions that they distort and ultimately defeat spontaneous human feelings. The things that make people most human are precisely the things that doom them to be victims. Suggesting that oppression is all-encompassing, that a society offers its members — particularly its women — only the alternatives of being dehumanized or victimized, is the truest form of social protest. Mizoguchi draws the lines of the conflict with clear and relentless logic, even as he sketches Miyoharu with warmth and compassion. He invests his film with the cruel complexity of life and the transcendent simplicity of art.

Princess Yang Kwei Fei is another of Mizoguchi's richest, most fully realized films. With his early training as a painter, he must have long anticipated this first chance to work in color. Not surprisingly, he utilizes color brilliantly; the film consists almost entirely of pastels whose textures evoke Japanese painting. In fact, the stylization of the color suggests that the film was deliberately constructed as a meditation not only on a popular legend and on the nature of beauty, but on the function of art itself. It is an art object, a statue, that introduces the story, drawing the old man to the contemplation of his lost past. This concern with art is echoed early in the story itself in the emperor's obsession with a painting of his dead wife that is clearly both art object and icon. And the fact that he himself prefers the pleasures of composing and listening to music to the burdens of state is central to the film's narrative development. In any case, the colors are clearly more artistic than natural-



Mizoguchi's *A Geisha* in release in the U.S. after 25 years.

istic, they are no more "realistic," no closer to the literal truth than is the story, clearly derived from legend rather than history.

The "plot" of *Princess Yang Kwei Fei* (an emperor falls in love with a woman who reminds him of his dead wife; the couple is happy together, but her family's intoxication with power ultimately causes the emperor's fall) is so simple that the story seems to tell itself. Most of the screen time is used to develop tones and moods rather than to expand the narration or develop characterization. In fact, in the literal sense, nothing "happens" in the film, since all the action takes place within the memory of the old man. Because the story is so simple, Mizoguchi is able to sketch it impressionistically with a few vignettes rather than a precise and comprehensive recounting of the "facts." This effect is amplified by the form of the transitions from one sequence to another; as the action fades, the screen gradually becomes blank before the next block of action begins. Even with this deliberate fragmentation, the film is remarkably lucid; Mizoguchi sketches important details with clarity and economy. A few scenes tell us everything we need to know about the Yang family: Chao can conceive of no better reason for gaining power than to become wealthy by accepting bribes; the sisters offer themselves to the Emperor with the specific hope of improving their social status. We do not need to see such people actually abusing power to recognize that the people of the Empire

are perfectly right to be outraged by the rise of such scoundrels. It is typical of Mizoguchi's economy of expression that the one scene where we do see a Yang abusing power is more resonant than a simple piece of exposition. One of the sisters rides through the marketplace and her retainers arrogantly attack the merchants; in the previous sequence in this setting, the Princess and the Emperor took delight, not in insisting on imperial prerogatives but in overlooking them, in sharing the lives of the common people (and, by so doing, escaping the pressures of politics). This previous sequence makes the later one doubly revealing, expressive in its context as well as its content.

What we see in the film is a couple whose personal satisfactions are constricted by external obligations. Our first two introductions to the Emperor, first as an old man, and then as the reigning Emperor, show him receiving instructions from subordinates, being requested — that is to say, required — to act against his own wishes. These scenes, particularly the one in which his music-making is interrupted by the call of duty, suggest the force with which political obligations can intrude on the quest for personal satisfactions. The Emperor is continually frustrated by such intrusions, yet he fails to confront the fact that they are inherent in his situation, that his own temperament is artistic rather than political. At the crucial moment he fails the Princess, by making a wrong, futile choice, not so much out

of a personal moral failure as from an inability to conceive of alternatives, to recognize that the quest for political power is inherently life-destroying. Similarly, he has chosen not to see the impossibility of "using" the Yang family for his own purposes. (Specifically, when he tells the Princess not to be alarmed by the popular resentment against her family, he shows such cataclysmically bad judgment that it is hard not to question his fitness to rule.)

The film consistently presents personal satisfaction in opposition to the pursuit of wealth or power. The only way the lovers can find private moments together is by escaping from the court. At the end of their private interlude, the couple are shown eating and drinking; the screen goes dark and the next image is of eating and drinking, this time at a royal banquet. Thus, quite literally, the political supersedes the personal.

The Princess, too, is caught between conflicting obligations, but her situation leaves her incapable of choice. She recognizes, from the beginning, that her actions are being controlled and manipulated, that she is not free. The comparison she makes is to a puppet, but, from the beginning, the pervasive metaphor is of invisibility. Her presence in the story is first registered, not by the sight of a person but by the sound of a disembodied voice performing menial chores. When she does appear directly, her face is obscured, first by shadows and then by a layer of grime. Later, when she is introduced to the Emperor, he fails even to notice her, and when he does finally see her, she is behind a metal grill, with her face in shadow. Her relationship between the Emperor may develop from the inner beauty he finds in her words, but he only finds that inner beauty because of her external resemblance to his dead wife. From her statue at the film's opening, to the presentation of her death, the Princess is consistently linked to images of objects.

Princess Yang Kwei Fei seems to consist largely of surface beauties, of precise compositions and expressive colors. In fact, the film's formal perfection is merely the vehicle to express another kind of beauty, a rich, compelling, and deeply-felt vision of the inexorable conflict between the quest for personal satisfactions on the one hand and the constraints of political and social environments on the other.

The Moral Universe of



Hitchcock's SPELLBOUND

By Thomas Hyde

One would hardly want to rank *Spellbound* (1945) as one of Hitchcock's richest or most perfectly conceived films. Even the Master himself (he can be puckishly agreeable when offered negative opinions of his work) told Truffaut in his interview book that it was "just another manhunt story wrapped up in pseudo-psychoanalysis."¹ Truffaut, concurring, dismisses the film as "somewhat of a disappointment" after a few brief exchanges. Robin Wood in his *Hitchcock's Films*² devotes but a short

paragraph to *Spellbound*, citing the incongruous Dali dream sequences and a troublesome "split in the thematic material" between the growth of the relationship of Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck and the progress of the murder plot. The film has its share of other weaknesses; Truffaut (assisted by Hitchcock) catalogues most of them: the Hollywood treatment of psychoanalysis in parts of Ben Hecht's script; Miklos Rozsa's grotesquely overdramatic score; Gregory Peck's insufficiently convincing portrayal of a potential madman-murderer. Yet the presence of flaws hardly justifies a lack of critical press, especially when a virtue can be produced for every flaw

(not the least of which is Ingrid Bergman's exquisite, dimensional performance), and particularly when the so-called flaws are often as interesting as the virtues. It is worth looking at *Spellbound* to discover what it is that makes it so pleasurable and uniquely a Hitchcock film.

As the precursor of *Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *Marnie*, *Spellbound* is Hitchcock's first film to deal with pathological mental cases and, even more prominently than in these or in any others, with psychoanalysis. Here John Ballan-

tine, who suffers from amnesia, assumes for a time the identity of a Dr. Edwardes, who is scheduled to replace the head of an insane asylum, a Dr. Murchison. The possibility is raised later that Ballantine murdered Dr. Edwardes and took over his identity out of guilt. Ballantine undergoes a journey through a series of mental as well as physical landscapes in order to trace down the clues to his real identity and to uncover the roots of his debilitating guilt complex. In all this he is aided by a psychiatrist, Dr. Constance Peterson, and by her mentor, Dr. Alex. In the end Dr. Murchison is exposed as the real murderer.

Now it is significant that in a film about psychoanalysis the cure for John's amnesia is not found on the analyst's couch but rather emerges from a series of experiential trials culminating in John's physically reenacting the episode which originally triggered his disturbance — the murder of Dr. Edwardes on the ski slope at Cumberland. Here, as elsewhere, Hitchcock seems to be responding to the common, popular belief about psychiatry that the patient can be cured of his deep problems by just talking them out. But this does not necessarily mean that Hitchcock is attacking psychoanalysis itself. Rather, as treated in the film, psychoanalysis becomes a figure which Hitchcock employs to express his disapproval of certain kinds of attitudes and assumptions associated with its application, so as to bring out the real issues with which he is concerned. Psychoanalytic practice is a vehicle for making an artistic statement; it is both MacGuffin and metaphor. It is not really even John Ballantine's film, for while the sensational psychoanalytic-murder plot holds our immediate surface attention, Hitchcock's sustained, essential focus here is on the emotional and moral development of Constance Peterson in her relation with Ballantine. The film depicts a learning process, not only that of Ballantine's recovery of his lost identity by following his guilt feelings to their unconsciously repressed source, but that of Constance forging a new identity by tapping a suppressed capacity within herself for feeling and committed action. What is being emphasized and approved here by Hitchcock is Constance's trusting involvement with John.

Ultimately more absorbing than the determination of John's innocence is their personal transformation —

becoming integrated within themselves and so redeemed for each other. Our interest in this is mediated less by the suspense elements through which Murchison's ostensive guilt is revealed than by the undercurrent of implication whereby a more basic, universal culpability is exposed in each of the characters. *Spellbound* shows the unwarranted guilt complex is a much rarer phenomenon than we might be inclined to suppose. In exploring the question of the appropriateness of one's feelings of guilt and self-doubt, *Spellbound* suggests a relation between moral and mental health that receives its most comprehensive exposition later in the character of *Psycho*'s Norman Bates. Hitchcock seems to be saying that guilt may be damaging when it remains beyond one's ability to act on it, but also when it is absent or unheeded. Guilt can be a healthy signal to direct one's awareness to what is, in Hitchcock's moral universe, a potential for moral error native to the human condition.

One of the major themes pointed up consistently in the film is the inadequacy of intellectual analysis when it is divorced from compassion, understanding involvement. This is introduced in the initial sequences as the classic opposition of book knowledge versus experiential knowledge, connected with the education of Constance Peterson. The film begins with Mary Carmichael, an inmate of the hospital, who we see display a rather thinly concealed hostility toward men (she nuzzles up to Harry the aide, then scratches his arm). In the subsequent session with Constance she then tells of another would-be seducer who got his moustache bitten off for his trouble. Taking the bait Hitchcock dangles for the amateur psychiatrist here, we can infer that Mary encourages men to accept this role in order to punish them, and that it indicates some deeply-rooted sexual conflicts in Mary, possibly oedipal in nature, possibly having to do with forbidden childhood feelings toward a father figure that she has not yet been able to overcome. Although she may desire a mature relationship with a man, she can't accomplish it under the contradictory terms she has established. Constance seems the cool, rational opposite of Mary. Starched and stiff in her white hospital coat, Constance's backed-off, cerebral, patronizing stance contrasts sharply with Mary's cultivated attractiveness and

her passionate, lascivious behavior ("Psychoanalysis bores the pants off me!"). Mary reacts to Constance's unfeeling attempts at analysis by throwing a book at her and calling her "Miss Frozen-Puss."

If we haven't already guessed it, when Constance next spurns Dr. Fleurot's advances we become aware that her detached, clinical attitude is not reserved solely for her professional relationships, but extends to the private ones as well. Fleurot lectures her on her "lack of human and emotional experience." "It's rather like embracing a textbook," he says. "You're exactly like Miss Carmichael. I'd like to throw a book at you — but I won't." Despite Fleurot's vicious, juvenile sniping at her later, and his subsequent jealousy, we can appreciate his frustration and see that he is basically correct in his estimation of her. She has evidently been dependent on books as the source of her knowledge of human behavior at the expense of direct, intimate experience. (In this respect, Constance is the forerunner of the know-it-all, bookish little sister figures such as Ann in *Shadow Of A Doubt* and Barbara in *Strangers On A Train*). And she is like Mary Carmichael in exhibiting a milder form of Mary's hysteria. We are, after all, given no indication that Fleurot does not genuinely care for her, even though in his approach he resembles more than slightly the masher from Philadelphia and the house detective in the Empire Hotel. Constance may understandably be repulsed by his aggressive moves, but the fact is, her aggressive rejection of him is symptomatic of her ignorance of certain legitimate human needs and obligations, not only those of others, but of her own.

Moreover, Constance is to be seen as accountable for this in a way in which Mary is not; Constance has no excuse for not regarding the responsibility to be aware of her own and others' emotional requirements. She is not prevented from investigating and evaluating her own responses, as Mary is by her mental condition. Constance's detachment and frigid demeanor, the complacent, presumptuous distancing of herself from human contact, is tantamount to the sin or pride. It is a willed and willing choice on her part, and this neglect of worldly knowledge is especially debilitating in a person of her profession, dedicated to helping people with serious problems of their own. This starting point for the evolu-

tion of Constance's trust in instinct and passion is love at first sight for Dr. Edwardes in the dining room at the asylum. The turning point, however, comes with her choosing to disregard reason and accompany Edwardes rather than revealing him to the police when he leaves the asylum. It is appropriate that the awakening in Constance of a person of open feeling should proceed from a spontaneous decision which logical calculation would have counselled her to avoid. For Constance, Dr. Edwardes's book on the guilt complex, which she thinks she ought to read, is substituted by an immersion in first-hand experience.

Having witnessed her obliviousness to the needs and motives of others, we now observe Constance's blindness to her own emerging feelings. Her self-deception with regard to her reasons for staying with John becomes obvious in the scene where she joins John in his hotel room in New York. She tells him she has come to help him, but only as a doctor, and as they embrace she murmurs, "It has nothing to do with love, nothing at all, nothing at all." Our interpretation of this transparency has been prepared for in previous scenes depicting her romantic distraction with John. What is at stake here is her ingrained definition of herself, her confidence in her intellectual and professional competency, her maintenance of a customary, secure decorum. Her precarious illusion of aloofness from and control over her world is being threatened by the passionate feelings involuntarily called forth from her. Her basic assumptions having been called into doubt, her circumvention here follows the same pattern as John's amnesia: the blocking-off (more consciously-impelled in Constance than in John) of the recognition of fallibility for fear of disturbing one's stable orientation to an imposed, faulty conception of reality. Constance's turning away from the haven of established authority is the right move to make, but with it comes the shocking awareness of the illusion of her own autonomy, to be replaced slowly by a more true, more sober vision of the limitations of personal freedom and independence.

As Constance progresses in discovering her capacity for the expression of feeling, we are made very conscious of her vulnerability in extending herself to John. Our responses to this are mixed. On the one hand, there is the matter of John's innocence or guilt

in respect to killing Edwardes. We are warned by Dr. Murchison that John is a "paranoid impostor" and that he is certainly guilty of dispatching Edwardes. Dr. Alex's condemnation of Dr. Edwardes for harboring John ("what kind of doctor is it that wants to bring a dangerous patient into a bowling alley...") also accents her impulsiveness and seems to cast doubt on her ability to judge wisely. She does underestimate Alex in his ability to "put two and two together." He has seen through their husband-and-wife story, and in the apparently menacing scene with John and the razor, where we are made the victims of our own expectations, Dr. Alex accordingly turns the tables on John. Constance subsequently tells Alex, "I couldn't feel this way about a man who was bad, who had committed a murder," an indication of her gain in self-perception in acknowledging the demands of her emotions. Yet it also seems at this point that she has swung too far in the direction of relying exclusively on instinct and emotional prejudice in evaluating John's character. Alex is wrong, however, in censuring her emotional fidelity to John, and Constance must abandon the paternal possessiveness and protection of Alex, and the kind of reserved authority he stands for, in favor of a more mature and responsible relationship with John. Constance's problem here yet is her lack of self-doubt, her lack of an accurate perspective of the scope of her actions and abilities with respect to the scope of circumstance, the way things operate in the world. She is correct in remaining with John and helping him to handle what her psychological probing has released. She must come to feel the full impact of what it means to be responsible for penetrating to the deepest center of one's selfhood, and to realize the problem of coping with what one finds there. Just as the turning point of John's rejuvenation occurs on the ski slope in the revelatory return to the childhood source of his guilt complex, so Constance begins her real transformation immediately after this, with the numbing shock that the happy ending to their romance and the vindication of her plans and efforts have been overturned by the emergence of the fact that Edwardes was murdered. Her reaction, looking up at John but not meeting his eyes, reflects her realization that despite having uncovered the origin of John's complex, despite the voice of her intuition, she

could still be wrong about his capacity for evil. The vision of doors swinging open at her first kiss with John is replaced by the vision of cell doors swinging closed, the end to which her presumption has led her. Her following distress at Alex's house marks the critical point of her diminishment at the perception of her own certain guilt: in being responsible, because of pride, self-interest and complacency, of bringing about the reversal of her own intentions and of assigning the man she loves to a fate her efforts were designed to avoid. Having now been humbled by the vision of her own culpability and of the complexities of character and situation of which she had not been aware, the way has been prepared for her to form a more realistic, adjusted idea of herself and of the life she has been leading. Her traumatic downfall has also been her salvation. She is now able to return to life and to act in accordance with a greater awareness of the moral weight of involvement, the implications and consequences of her actions, and the limitations of her abilities.

Particularly enigmatic here is the problem of John's behavior, his response to certain stimuli, the matter of his guilt. John's amnesia, we are told, is the result of the repression of memory by the subconscious mind in order to evade damaging self-incrimination arising out of a past childhood event. We find that John did indeed kill his brother in a boyhood accident, and the similarity of Edwardes's death at Cumberland provoked the amnesia as a defense. But along with the repression or guilt a simultaneous desire for and fear of punishment manifests itself obliquely in John's actions, a tension of anxiety that is linked to aggressive and sexual energy. John's taking on of Dr. Edwardes's identity can be interpreted as an unconscious desire to be exposed and to confess. There is an implied parallel here with Garmes, whose previous example lends weight to the suspense at Constance's involvement with John. Like John, Garmes suffers from a guilt complex; he believes himself to have killed his father. Constance's counsel to Garmes is a rather unhelpful assurance: "People often feel guilty about things that happened in their childhood." Prevented from confronting and confessing the source of his sense of his very real guilt, Garmes eventually finds a punishing, destructive outlet for



his anxiety, an possibility we later feel is imminent in John. Constance's dismissal here is a further symptom of her overall naivete. She is ignorant of the meaning and importance of guilt related to crimes, real or imagined, since she has not faced the possibility of sin in herself. She is mistaken about the nature of one's experience of guilt. What she has to learn is that guilt is not explained away, or suppressed for it will surely break out again and, while it may be mistaken and damaging to blame oneself for unconscious intentions or acts for which a person cannot be held responsible, to be without a sense of guilt or doubt may be equally invidious.

Unlike Garmes, John's guilt seems to have sexual dimensions that are manifested more clearly on the surface. John's repressed feelings on occasion erupt past his normal exterior in sudden, hostile outbursts of aggression, when triggered by the reminders of the guilty incident of his brother's death — dark lines and the color white. These signs almost always appear when he is in the company of Constance. The first

time this occurs, John's "spell" is brought on as a result of what is supposed to be a swimming pool that Constance has drawn on the white tablecloth. However, the drawing is also clearly vaginal in shape. In other instances, she discourages his forceful advances in order to interrogate him about his guilty past. John subsequently falls into his trance, and apparently influenced by the earlier denial of his gratification, his subconscious aggressions emerge in resentment: "If there's anything I hate it's a smug woman!" John's outbreaks here resemble those of Fleurot's. John, a medical student, is connected with Fleurot by Dr. Murchison's comment too, that Fleurot exhibits "the manners of a medical student" in regard to his bitter remarks directed at Constance. John's treatment of Constance suggests that John, too, harbors an immature attitude toward women and sex, one which links him to Fleurot, the house dick and the masher. John's relationship with Constance, so as to be healthy and lasting, must be free of the taints of exploitation and self-indul-

gence. John must come to dissociate aggression from sex and to expend those aggressive energies in useful labor — as Alex points out to Constance: "There's lots of happiness in working hard — maybe the most." Perhaps we are to see that John is not to be considered responsible for this behavior in the same way as Constance's other admirers in the film, due to its origin in his unconscious guilt problems. If this is so, then the solving of John's guilt complex by the divulging of its origin in childhood fears (punishment grossly out of proportion to offense — undue guilt) implies that John's aggression-sex problems are also on the way to being healed. The last scene of the film, showing John taking a more suitable, responsible stance toward marriage, can be interpreted as indicating the growth of John's edification that has coincided with Constance's development in the film.

The thematic and moral issues raised by the interaction of characters and situations in *Spellbound* are summarized in two major pairs of

scenes incorporating subjective camera shots occurring near the beginning and end of the film, and serving as reference marks against which may be measured the progress of the characters and the advancement of the film's statement. The first pair of incidents, in retrospect, call our attention to the progress of Constance, as, from her point of view, the camera tracks up the stairs of the asylum to bring into central notice the door of Dr. Murchison's room. In both cases, it is Constance's willing choice to climb the stairs and confront what is beyond the door that is the major issue. Throughout the film John has been associated with guilt, aggression, emotion, and with downward movements, descending inside himself, into his dreams, uncovering his subconscious and repressed memories, and discovering his relation to this inner life. Constance has been associated with self-certainty, reserve and reason, and with ascending movements, moving outward to experience in the world, to encounters with others, expanding her consciousness of the potential for both love and destruction in human character and human relationships. Here in the initial instance it is the false Dr. Edwardes that waits on the other side of the door. She is unaware of the dangers and complications her involvement with him may entail; she is only vaguely conscious of the nature and force of her new-found feelings to which she will accede. She crosses to the library first, to get Dr. Edwardes's book, a symbol of her diluted life of intellectual retreat. She chooses to cross the threshold, and as she faces John across another doorway, her real motives begin to become clear: "I thought I wanted to discuss your book with you — I'm amazed at the subterfuge." This is the beginning of self-revelation. The second tracking shot, reminding us of the first and its associated implications, calls our attention to the progress that has been made, the difference in Constance. In this case, it is the duplicitous Dr. Murchison who inhabits the room, and Constance, having suffered through the experiencing of guilt in herself and in John, is now fully armed with the knowledge of what she is doing and its possible consequences. Where in the first scene the essential rightness of following her instinctual desires was emphasized, her choice to enter the room this time is a measure of her realization of the depth of complexity and responsibility that such a commit-

ment necessitates.

The final set of scenes recapitulates cinematically the major themes developed within the film: the deception of appearances, the untrustworthiness of authority, the nature of guilt and sin, and the moral responsibility of human involvement. They occur from the point of view first, of John Ballantine, and second, of Dr. Murchison. In the context of the first shot, Ballantine has descended the stairs at Dr. Alex's home to confront Alex at his desk, again, across a doorframe. John is in one of his trances, his hand clutching a razor, which we are made to think he will use on Alex, as he has just spared the sleeping Constance. The situation is symbolic of the primal scene, with John competing with a father-figure for the possession of Constance. As John raises to his lips the glass of white milk, which we know will serve to fuel the fire of his aggressions, the camera is John's eyes. Alex is seen through the bottom of the glass as the milk gradually rises up and the screen fades to white. What we learn, of course, is that the threat, while real enough by itself, was not to be carried out so inevitably as we thought. With the drugged glass of milk, the distinctions between victim and victimizer begin to break down, but with the advantage here on the side of the one most consciously aware of the deep motives and vulnerability of others.

Likewise, in the final confrontation between Constance and Dr. Murchison, it is Constance who must put what she has learned about herself on the line by trusting in her intuition of its applicability to Murchison. The situation here is advanced a rational and moral notch from the previous one. Like John, Constance must face down the figure of fatherly authority in order to win her lover, but here the similarity ends. She knows that Murchison is the murderer of Edwardes and is aware of what may be the ultimate consequences to herself of this act of emotional fidelity to John. Murchison proves his skill at analysis by correctly interpreting the dream that damns him as guilty, parallel to Alex's deciphering of John's illness and unconscious intent in the former scene. The gun, seen from the subjective point of view of Murchison, corresponds to the glass of milk as the externalization of apparent danger. As the gun and camera follow Constance across the room, she appeals to Murchison on the basis of logic not to commit a second murder

for, she says, considering his mental condition at the time, he would not be accounted guilty or responsible for the first. As with Garmes and later with John, the resort to reason proves inadequate. Murchison, having failed to admit his own moral condition to himself, is done in by his own complacency. The light of truth bursts in through the hole in Constance's reasoning, inflaming his sense of guilt rather than absolving it. The destructive pointer of blame, associated now with self-righteous authority, comes round to confront itself, and ourselves.³

The simplistic question then, of the efficacy of reason over emotion has been transcended in the course of the film through its demonstration of the imperatives of self-awareness, love and responsible involvement with others. More humbly conscious of their own capacity for error and the nature of the world's demands, Constance and John deserve to be reunited, saved for a better life. Rather than kiss and part, as the other couples in the train station, their approved example is to kiss and remain, in faith and trust, together.

Footnotes

1. Truffaut, Francois, *Hitchcock*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 118.
2. London: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1977, p. 44.
3. Robin Wood says of this shot that "it is one of the rare instances I can think of in Hitchcock of a *pointless* use of identification technique, since none of us want to shoot Ingrid Bergman and we feel no connection of any kind with the murderer." (p. 44) I disagree that there is a lack of connection. It's just that the connection is of an odd sort. The shot involves a *disparity* between our feelings and Murchison's action that is very much to the point. True, we don't want to kill Ingrid Bergman; neither, really, does Murchison. The gun suddenly turned on *us* though, brings home, if just for an instant, the enormity and reality of suicide. This puzzling personal threat, brief and implausible as it may be, gives us a shock, disturbs our security, and mobilizes a self-preservation response so different from the one whose head we are supposed to be in that it forces us to query Murchison's reasons with a sense of urgency that no other treatment of the scene could provoke.



DISPATCHES FROM OCCUPIED HOLLYWOOD

Philip Blomberg

Los Angeles. The great metropolitan enigma. No matter where you are everything seems to be at least a half-hour away (one and a half at rush hour). The freeways here give you the persistent feeling you just missed your exit — and usually you have. Out in the valley there's the Sepulveda Dam Project, flood control mind you, where the nearest mass of water is beyond the hills in the ocean, giving the appearance of a dam in the middle of a near-desert. There are areas within the city limits where city hall is 25 miles away. Hollywood is supposed to be the movie capitol, but 80% of all new releases open exclusively in Westwood village — ten miles away. Some people say they're from L.A. when actually they may be from any one of a seemingly endless number of municipalities in the tri-county area.

Hollywood is considered the center of the movie business although the record business took over long ago. None of the seven major studios are in Hollywood, half the theatres on Hollywood Boulevard are X-rated, the major producers' offices are scattered in a crescent from Hollywood to Santa Monica; all of which leaves but Sam Goldwyn's run down fortress in the immediate area. One assumes that as long as the stars remain in the sidewalk, the Chinese Theatre (no longer Grauman's; Mann's) thrives, memorabilia is sold at every fourth shop on the boulevard, the Hollywood sign — such as it is — still stands, and Larry Edmunds Book Shop keeps alive the illusion of a movie capitol. And people will keep coming here to glimpse the remnants of the area's once great past, or move here to break into the dream business. The human fallout from the latter migration is incredible, and yet accepted and as commonplace as the smog. (The smog, I might add, appears to the newcomer as an obvious semaphore to an apocalypse due to arrive at

any moment.)

These also-rans, has-beens and never-weres are commonly (and too casually) referred to as Hollywood's walking wounded, and can be seen most anywhere about without looking very hard. Their story cannot help but read like Walter Winchell copy; they do come from everywhere in \$300 cars to hit it big in Tinseltown (how people hate that expression here). That big break is forever just over the rise, something is always cooking in a couple weeks, man, just you wait. Jobs on the fringe of the industry are fairly easy to come by; running film about town, working in one of the zillion movie houses, or some such thing, but the real breakthroughs are rare and usually take years longer than anyone ever planned, leaving a sizeable mass in limbo with false hopes. Other distractions, chiefly sex, drugs and alcohol, take over for many and they lose sight of why they came in the first place.

In a renovated motel near the Hollywood Bowl, inhabited mainly by elderly folks, I saw David, a red-haired man of 26-going-on-sixty, sitting catatonic on a bench with a view of the freeway. I didn't have the guts to disturb him, but his neighbors said he came here four years ago with high hopes of making it as an actor. Disappointments and speed killed whatever talent and spirit he once had, and now he lives on welfare, eats at the local hamburger stand, speaks to virtually no one, wears the same clothes for weeks on end and sits on the bench staring at the freeway. Incredible.

An extreme case perhaps, but it scares the hell out of me anyway. The neophyte best beware; the city has teeth.

I am a neophyte, too. I came to Los Angeles like so many others to get into the movie business. It worked — I was an extra in Mark Rydell's *The Rose*,

shot in Long Beach with the largest number of paid extras ever used, about eight thousand. The crowd was impatient, they wanted to see Bette Midler. But instead of using Bette to relax and coax the crowd, an AD kept reminding us that we were being paid for our efforts, a method that produced diminishing returns. Many of the people there were just in off the streets, or Bette fans, but it was funny to hear a couple of people talking about the scripts they were writing. Everybody's writing a screenplay, maybe because it's been spread around that writing is the way to break in.

Weird things happen all the time here. I was in a restaurant that has a toaster on every table (you ask for toast and the waitress brings you bread and a finger pointed at the toaster) when I heard three tired people discussing last night's *Saturday Night Live*, only it was Friday. Sometimes you are stopped in the street and shown various film titles and asked which ones you prefer. Months later you still haven't heard about the picture. Market research is the new "science" in L.A., but so far it is most famous for telling Fox that no one would pay to see a picture with the word "wars" in the title. Market research also instructed Warners to change *Dog Soldiers*. Unfortunately they changed it to *Who'll Stop the Rain*.

I took a drive for one last look past the "Hollywood" sign before it is fixed up (Alice Cooper donated \$27,000 for the "o"). Naturally I thought of Peg Entwistle, and of what had driven her to suicide. But the thing is, in L.A. you don't have to commit suicide by killing yourself. David shows that. L.A. is a long shot at the fast breaks that are popping all around you like popcorn in an over-heated cooker, or so it is believed. But some people burn their hands without getting a good grasp on their dreams.



Reviews

Corvette Summer

Corvette Summer is everything *Heaven Can Wait* tries to be and is not: warm, witty, and seriously concerned with issues of American materialism and business. It is a wonderful film, perhaps a great film, and there is not a little anticipated scoffing from the reader in my mind as I write this. After all, how can one say without expected derision that one's favorite works of art are *Ulysses*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Corvette Summer*? (Not that I am suggesting that the achievement of *Corvette Summer* is of the same nature as these other works, but within the film world, I find it to be of the same stature. The summer of 1978 was the worst in quality ever to hit American film output, but for certain creators it was also the best. Unfortunately, the good films, few as they were, were dragged down by critical humbuggery with the rest of the swarm.) It is that word "corvette" and car culture in general which simply can't be taken seriously by the film reviewers, reviewers who revere the very films that the New Wave critics fought to have taken seriously in the Fifties. There seem to be two types of people who are causing the greatest harm to film study and appreciation at this time. The first is the Dictator of Form, who cannot "like" a film unless it conforms to a preconceived idea of how a film should look. Hitchcock and Scorsese are venerated, while Rossellini goes unseen. There is nothing like a breakthrough of style in *Corvette Summer*, just good, solid film-making, intelligently at the disposal of the themes and emotions. The second is



Note the Minnie Mouse heads on Annie Potts's sandals.

the Dictator of Content, an "intellectual" (in the original usage of the word) who would ridicule the film because of its title, and in his over-critical frame of mind, casting about but unable to find a film to like, because others like it, or because it does not adhere to a pre-ordained content standard for "Film," will end up overrating a film of limited merits, say, *The Lacemaker*, for example. I need not mention that their *idea*, and of course it is the wrong idea, of *Corvette Summer* may prevent them from seeing it at all. A film can be about any damn thing it wants; our evaluation of it rests on how it lives up to its own internal standards, something *Corvette Summer* does admirably, where every aspect of the film resonates with some other part, where no part of the film could be detached without destroying the whole. The title could imply a kids' movie, a drive-in car-chase film, or any number of things, until one sees the film and finds out not what the title suggests, but what it actually means.

The audiences with whom I have seen the picture have always been young, mostly girls. The car-chase crowd, whose supply of films seems interminable, may find it slight of action, as they did *Citizen's Band*. The

film seems to have enough star pull to, so far, do fair business. The film is a romantic adventure-comedy, and that only young people, young girls to be precise, will support it, says both a great deal about them, and a lot less about the older viewers who don't.

The story is simple. A young man, Ken Dantley (Mark Hamill), in his high school car mechanics class helps to build a Corvette, which he admires possessively. His instructor, Ed McGrath (Eugene Roche), warns him against becoming too attached to the car, because it will "always let you down." The car is finished, and while the entire class is out testing it one night on Ventura Boulevard it is stolen. Ken becomes obsessed with getting it back. Given a lead that it might be in Las Vegas, he hitchhikes there, at one point being picked up by another L.A. high school student named Vanessa (Annie Potts) who is going to Vegas to become rich as a prostitute. As his search brings him closer to the car, which he sees several times, his at first stormy relationship with Vanessa deepens, overcoming his sexual inhibitions. Eventually he finds out that the car was stolen, with the help of McGrath himself, by Wayne Lowry (Kim Milford), who owns a body shop

in Vegas that deals in hot cars supplied by McGrath. McGrath convinces Ken, who is as talented as Lowry in custom work, to also go to work for Lowry, who was once a student of McGrath's. He does, but is shamed by Vanessa into returning to his original purpose of getting back the Corvette, which he does, and, after a climactic car chase, deposits the car back at his high school, leaving it, his relationship with Vanessa, he now realizes, being more important.

This dry synopsis does not do justice to the life of the film, the wit of the dialogue, or the perfect structure and logical progression of the plot. What is more valuable about the film, however, is the romance that develops between Ken and Vanessa, perfectly realized by the actors; Annie Potts, with her beautiful comic voice (note her delivery of the line, "You wanna hitchhike you gotta stick something out."), and Mark Hamill, who shows rare comic ability, among other acting talents that seemed to have been suppressed in *Star Wars*. Eugene Roche gives an excellently controlled and natural performance, his stern affection and weighty presence serving an ironic counterpoint to his entrapping commitment to Lowry. Incidentally, there is an amusing cameo by that minor axiom of the cinema, Dick Miller, as Mr. Lucky, whose winning streak in Vegas was started by a two-dollar bill which he gives to Ken, and which Ken later gives to Vanessa (Miller really should have played Lenny Bruce in the filmed biography of his life).

The giving of the two-dollar bill is a broad hint to both Ken and the spectator. Not long after this we get our first sight of Lowry, who bears a striking resemblance to Ken. Ken could become Lowry, and, after he first goes to work for Lowry (demanding extra pay in advance, which, as Lowry says, "I would have done."), affects Lowry's style of dress. They are not twins so much as moral opposites, a possibility of dehumanization who Ken, in his innocence, is threatened with becoming. He is saved, however, by the alternative of Vanessa.

The most important scene, the most moving and complex, is the one in which, after his conversion to "Lowryism," he tries to "buy" Vanessa. Ken is shy and inhibited, and the Corvette is an obvious substitution for him for his inability to deal with people (he is pushy with certain of his class-

mates, and his obsession with retrieving the car, while admirable in a certain sense, is limited by what the obsession takes him away from). It is seemingly because of his relationship with his mother, who treats him with a mixture of physical voluptuousness — she kisses him goodnight full on the mouth — and indifference; when she returns home from a night out she finds Ken locked out of their trailer because she forgot to leave the extra key in the mailbox (they live in a trailer, as he will later live in a U-haul and in Vanessa's van). Later she moves abruptly, unconcerned over whether her son knows her plans or not. He has a way of finding her, as she explains to McGrath.

Vanessa is his first sexual experience, and through their relationship, he becomes able to relax his attitudes toward both sex and society. Vanessa, too, changes: she ceases to regard people as "paying customers" and estimating them in terms of how they would estimate her. When McGrath confesses that he is involved with Lowry, Ken, shocked at the betrayal of someone he thought of as more than just a teacher, and seeing that he has no alternative but to accept the invitation to work with Lowry also, has his newly acquired openness to people soured. He now sees people the way Vanessa used to, while Vanessa, about whose background we know little, touched by Ken's all-consuming desire to find the car, and by his shyness, moves more toward Ken in her views. He succumbs to the temptation of being Lowry, of being inhuman (we never see Lowry in any but dark clothing, and never see him interact with any people but his hirelings). He dresses and acts like Lowry in an innocent's parody of what he thinks Lowry is like. At any rate, he takes Vanessa to an expensive hotel room. I extract the following dialogue from the scene:

Vanessa: What are you trying to pull? Oh, I love it. Did you sell your car?

Ken: No, no.

Vanessa: That wasn't your car to sell, you know, it belongs to the school.

Ken: I never sold it!

Vanessa: So, uh, where did all this money come from, Mr. Dantley? You didn't pay for this with a two-dollar bill.

Ken: I got a job. Pays 850 a week.

Vanessa: 850 a week!

Ken: We do custom work. Special cars for special people.

Vanessa: Oh, I get it. You're gonna make it an inside job. Steal your own car back. Do you think you can pull it off?

Ken: (Laughs) What are you talking about? 850 a week. That's what I'm pulling off.

Vanessa: Well, what about your car?

Ken: You gotta see it for what it is. It's a commodity to be bought and sold like anything else on this earth. Don't laugh (she is crying). I'm not telling you anything new. Thing is, I can have any car I want now. A Corvette, a Cadillac, a Lamborghini.

Vanessa: Lamborghini?

Ken: What's the matter?

Vanessa: Oh, it's great, I..I guess.

Ken: Waaait a minute. I got something to cheer you up. I'm a paying customer.

Vanessa: Oh, Jesus.

Ken: Oh, what am I doing. You're worth a lot more than 20 bucks. Here's another fifty. You're worth a lot more than that.

Vanessa: You keep your money. This one's on the house.

The dialogue, brilliant, is flat on the page. One really must see how the two actors give meaning and variety to the lines. The presentation is straightforward, simple two-shots. What is crucial about the scene is how it brings together all the strands of the film.

Suddenly Ken is acting toward Vanessa the way she expected and wanted him to act at the start of the film. But Vanessa has relinquished her belief in people as commodities. When we first see her, driving her van, she is listening to earphones, closed off from the world, the way Ken is in his self-absorbed search for the Corvette. Vanessa is limited in her world view by the fact that she sees it as a marketplace, with her mercenary use of sex (not an uncommon attitude). But she has changed.

When Ken refers to cars as commodities, he is quoting McGrath from an earlier scene in the film. McGrath, finding Ken alone in the shop with the Corvette on Prom night, tells him (after giving him a glass of Scotch, "from General Motors," which Ken makes a guess at as wine) not to feel too close to the car. "I've been around automobiles all my life. They're mechanical devices. They always let you down. You buy 'em, you drive 'em, you break 'em, you fix 'em. You sell 'em. They're goods on the marketplace. Easy come, easy go. Don't get too attached to this car." Actually he is warning him because he is planning on

taking it himself, but at the time Ken thinks that McGrath is "fooling" him, that he loves the car as much as Ken does. (This is important because it diverts our attention from the possibility that McGrath is a villain.)

Ken's offer of fifty dollars reminds us of their first meeting when she asks him how much he thinks she is worth. He mentions fifteen dollars, until he notices her obvious chagrin, and ups it to fifty, acting as if she had misheard him the first time. The second time he sees her, she has a black-eye, sadly unsuited for the life of a hooker. She complains that all she needs is a costume, a black velvet dress with a black neck ribbon — which she appears in after this scene when he goes looking for her, having returned, because of Ken's lapse, to her former "life." When he finds her, this second "betrayal" awakens him to his original mission, and he does proceed to steal back the car. It is utterly poignant when she says the sex will be "on the house."

The "buying" scene, in its economy and depth, is the emotional climax of the film.

It is not only like Lowry Ken is in danger of becoming, but also like a car itself. After a long (and hilarious) pursuit of the Corvette on a bicycle, he is captured by Lowry's gang, and, in order to escape, he has to submerge himself in a barrel of oil, the black sludge anticipating his eventual appropriation of Lowry's style of dress, and also of Vanessa's black velvet hooker's costume. When he gets back to Vanessa, she has to wash him off in a car wash. He is a car, a machine having to be machine-washed. He curls up on the floor in a fetal position, as Vanessa calls him "lucky" and congratulates him for doing it all himself (he didn't).

He has realized his encroaching mechanization and his return to infantility is necessary for re-birth (his affectation of Lowry is "adolescent" and caused by the further disruption of his beliefs caused by McGrath's confession). Earlier he told Vanessa that a Corvette is a "man's" car, but, in terms of the film, he is not yet a man, because of the still present danger of dehumanization.

The final car chase, which culminates in the return of the car to the school, the quasi-forgiveness/rejection of McGrath, and the solidifying of the relationship between Vanessa and Ken (who, walking away from him on the campus, because of her thinness



Corvette Summer: Annie Potts and Mark Hamill.

and funny walk, elicits a certain discomforted laughter from the audience, until Hamill defuses it by calling to her as the "girl with the funny walk," acknowledging her — precious — oddity. First lesson of comedy: make sure the audience is laughing with you, at what you want them to laugh at. Acknowledging "flaws" in advance will prevent caricature later), is between Ken in his red Corvette and Lowry in his black car, red and black being the colors of roulette, the game before which Vanessa stands in the casino prior to the start of his plan to steal back the car, and which focuses the greed, dehumanization, and prostitution into the human terms of the chase. Ken wins not only because of the two-dollar bill Miller gave him, but because, with Vanessa, he has the human edge.

There is so much I could describe about the film: the brilliance of the plot twist of having Ken absorbed into Lowry's organization; the various modes of transportation Ken utilizes in order to give chase; McGrath's association with drink, and water; as well as the little touches from Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbin's screenplay and Robbin's direction (their previous film also dealt with a couple involved in a chase necessary to retrieve something that belongs to them, *The Sugarland Express*, and they also gave Spielberg the idea of having Barry kidnapped in *CE3K*); Ken rocking in the U-Haul; Ken pulling Vanessa through a casino

as she struggles with her swim-fins; Vanessa realizing she has been spraying Ken with wax. I could quote the script all night — better the reader see the film, with its excellent photography by Frank Stanley, and music by Craig Safan, perfectly keyed to the emotional highs and lows of the film (we know, for example, when Vanessa car-washes him that it is not the high point she thinks it is, because the musical background is the sad flute theme we hear occasionally throughout the film). I can only urge the film be seen in order to experience its deep resonance and great fun.

Douglas Holm

The Fury

Negative:

In terms of art, *The Fury* is garbage; in moral terms, an atrocity. The film career of Brian De Palma has always been drenched in blood, and he has driven himself relentlessly toward the position of "fright-master," which seems to hold some special magic for him. This Hitchcock idolater, who steals shamelessly from Hitchcock without "understanding" him, has forsaken any artistic ambitions he may have had in order to fall into the clutches of Frank Yablans, like an innocent victim in one of his own films, where his cynical and defeatist attitude toward life can merge perfectly with the King of Trash. De Palma has talent. He has a film mind. He thinks

cinematically with a spontaneous sense of what works within the context of each of his later films. But he has the emotional maturity of a 12 year old computer fan. He has no moral outlook which communicates itself to the audience. Art is more than form, it is the interplay of a multitude of moralities, and, despite the occasional unbalance in a given artist, it is a balanced view of life, which would not exclude despair, but would exclude defeatism.

And De Palma's cynicism is so blatantly a pose. He is a puppet-master. He has the ability to create characters for which we care, but it is only to destroy them, as if on some childish level he wants to hurt the feelings of the viewer. He likes to draw out the emotions of the audience so as to cause them more pain, hence his repetitious use of slow-motion, which is more extreme than that of anything Peckinpah has been accused of doing. *The Fury* is positively Jacobean in its carnage: virtually every principal character but one meets some horrible death in the course of the film. De Palma claims he can do this "blood and guts stuff" in his sleep. I wish he would confine his morbid fantasies to his dreams, rather than rub the noses of the public in them. But let us examine the film itself.

The first shot of the film shows a beach, as two figures swim out of the water and plop down on the sand a few feet from the camera. Why? Why are we forced to sit and watch two strangers walk forward before the dialogue, before the film really begins? The shot itself is undistinctive, nothing much happens, it makes no plot sense or thematic point, and we have to endure it while it runs its course. The whole beginning has that haphazard tone of a "good idea" that film students are fond of; it makes no sense, so let the critics figure it out, I just know I want it. A lot happens in the next few minutes, much of it incomprehensible, but we do know that Peter Sansa is shot at, and his son Robin is "kidnaped" by the traitorous Childress, just following a commensal talk between Peter and Robin, in which several plot elements are thrown at the viewer. The film is heavily plotted, and there are several loose ends, that at first, because of the quick pace, we don't notice. Later we don't care. Peter, thought dead, gets back at the last minute, just so that De Palma can make him shoot Childress and develop



Kirk Douglas in *The Fury*.

an elaborate and pointless homage to *Dr. Strangelove*. As Robin and Peter sit at the table (Childress casting a glance back at them that so utterly forecasts doom) the camera tracks around them in a half-moon, and then returns. But why? I don't know. To show off, I guess, as in the last shot of *Obsession* that drives the audience nuts with its giddy ostentation.

In Chicago things improve slightly; after all, we're beginning to recognize faces. Carrie Snodgrass is introduced as Hester, one of those giving, loving De Palma people who die so hideously, in this case, to be hit by a car and plunged through a windshield (if the windshield of a real car broke as it does in *The Fury*, the manufacturer would be in deep trouble). Robin kills about 20 Arabs, seemingly because they are associated in his mind with those who "killed" his Father — but then, doesn't he hate his father because he deserted him? It doesn't matter; let's just go on with the completely pointless sequence.

Fiona Lewis, as Susan, shows some compassion for Robin in his psychotic state, and this justifies her brutal murder by Robin in one of the most gruesome, sadistic, and misogynous scenes in the history of American film. We have a bit of everything in this film: car chases; Douglas Fairbanks-like swinging from building to building; psychic powers; and now blood running down a woman's thigh from her psychically-burst loins. None of it hangs together, however. What sort of mind would follow a (highly unfunny) comedy scene around a reactionary family, with a car chase that cul-

minates in the brutal death of four men? I don't get it. Is there some important theme here working itself out? Themes are not "hidden" only for critics to unearth them, otherwise nobody would believe what critics write. A theme has to have some foot in the door of the film, or else it just isn't there. I see no important theme in *The Fury* that could justify such cruelty.

Finally, in a climax that, in its lackluster staging and organization, was obviously thought up at the last minute (at one point, as Peter hits the ground after his son, John Williams's music rises, as if it were about to go somewhere, then suddenly recedes, as Cassavetes begins his line) De Palma at last gets his chance to mimic Hitchcock, this time from *To Catch a Thief*. Camera placement and cutting are very close to Hitchcock's original scene where Brigitte Auber dangles from Cary Grant's clutch. Again, why? Does this homage mean anything, as does Scorsese's to Gordard in *Taxi Driver*? No, it is "just the way to do it, because Hitchcock invented the vocabulary." Crap. One doesn't have scenes like this often, and it doesn't appear in Farris's novel. De Palma just wanted to do another Hitchcock scene, but as usual, sans all moral compassion.

At least there is one good thing about this film: there isn't any split-screen work. De Palma keeps wanting us to like this effect, but, except for *Carrie*, it rarely works. The effect is confusing, and flattens out the tone of a scene, and adds no suspense that couldn't be achieved through simple cross-cutting. In fact, in a simple two-frame split-screen at all times one of the two screens, as in *Sisters*, is unimportant material, in fact is intentionally made dull so that the viewer's eye and the mood of the scene is not torn. Aldrich, not always so excessive, throws about 12 images at the eye in *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, and it doesn't work. The technique functions in *Carrie* because the alternation between any two given shots is accelerated by rapid editing and creative placement, *vidi* the cutting where Carrie looks down and sees the cord leading to the microphone.

I am vituperative toward the film because a lot of people I know take De Palma so seriously. I think they're hoodwinked by his flashy style and attractive projects. He is a comic director, in the same way, but not of the same quality, as Hitchcock is a

social satirist. De Palma's "themes" (read, "similar concerns and events from film to film") are more obsessive, or should I say redundant, than Hitchcock's, Lang's, or any other director who deals in horror and suspense. This redundancy has simply got to be a barrenness of ideas or the natural manifestation of certain tendencies in a talented man who is using his ability to cash in on the public's anxieties. De Palma wants to make money off me with his violent, exploitative trash? Then let him eat dynamite.

Ken Alakine

Positive:

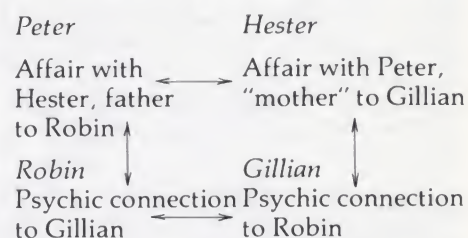
My friend Ken Alakine seems to be upset because Brian De Palma is not Alfred Hitchcock. He also seems to take De Palma's films as a personal attack against his own moral beliefs (whatever they may be — it isn't clear from reading his short offensive).

There is a limit, obviously, to comparisons between directors, espe-

cially when the intentions of the two men are different. I am well aware that space limitations prevent him from going into a great lot of detail concerning what is "wrong" with *The Fury*, yet I still get the feeling that his reaction to De Palma's "cruelty" has made him unable to see the film in any other way than that which he has made it out of his own projection. Ken's examples can all be shown to be not what he thinks of them.

His main complaint is of a lack of moral thematic in the film. The shot of Robin and Peter in Israel in which the camera performs a 180 as they sit at a table, then returns, at which point Childress interrupts them, sends Robin away, himself leaves and *then* gives the ominous look that so disturbs Alakine, would be just a showy effect, unless one were to recollect the point later in the film when the shot is used again, but in the opposite direction, as Gillian and Hester sit at the dining-room table, and discuss much the same things as

Robin and Peter did: functioning in society, relations with the opposite sex. With the reversal of the camera movement we have also a reversal of sexes — Peter and his son, Hester and her "daughter" — and we can plainly see the symmetry of the four relationships:



They constitute a family of sorts, and the whole movement of the film is toward Peter coming into contact with his "daughter" Gillian. More important, each shot occurs before an outburst of violence which destroys the unity felt between the principals. Also the first feeling of psychic unity is felt between Robin and Gillian in that one burst of violence on the stairway, a

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

— Donne

A study of the significance of character names in Brian DePalma's *The Fury* supports other evidence pointing to the film as stylized morality play rather than cheap sensationalism, as the film is all too readily labelled.

Taken from a John Farris novel of the same name, *The Fury's* foundation in myth and folklore has been strengthened by director De Palma and screenwriter Farris. The consistent symbolism of the film could be credited to Farris alone were it not for the similar uniform flow of symbols of De Palma's other recent films, and the weaknesses of Farris's novel.

"This is the anti-Christ," reads the Bible in I John 22:22, "He who denies the father and the son." The passage serves as an excellent description of Childress (John Cassavetes) from the standpoint of both plot and theme. The name Childress is a shortened version of Childermass, the character's name in Farris's novel (the name was shortened by De Palma so as to be easier to pronounce).

Childermass is a Hebrew holiday (December 28th) commemorating the slaughter of Jewish children by Herod. It is no accident that the opening scene of the film, introducing Peter, his son Robin, and Childress, takes place in the Holy Land.

This symbolism gives us a key to understanding the change in the Childress death scene of Farris's novel in the film version. In the novel, Gillian strangles Childress as he sits in a bathtub. Not exactly apocalyptic. The violent, total triumph of Gillian over Childress at the end of De Palma's film befits and underlines the Holy Spirit vs. Satan/Gillian vs. Childress analogy only hinted at in Farris's novel.

The character Hester has one plot function, but this function is underlined twice in her name. Hester is a "coined name," a combination of the ancient Greek Hestia and the traditional name Esther. Common to both Greek and Roman mythology, Hestia was called Vesta by the Romans. Her job, with either name, was to guard virgins, hence the term "vestal virgins."

In the Bible, Esther helped rescue her fellow Jews from the destruction planned for them by Haman, an evil minister of the king (Esther 3:7). In both versions. Esther/Hester accomplished their tasks because they were working from within in a devious fashion.

The name Robin has no concrete meaning, but comes from English folklore, where it was used for the young hero of a story, as with Robin Goodfellow and Robin Hood.

In Hebrew, Peter means "a rock." This certainly describes Peter Sanza. Of the twelve disciples of Christ, Peter

was the zealous hothead who cut off the ear of a Roman soldier as Christ was being taken from them. In much the same way, Peter Sanza maims Childress, "killing" his left arm as Robin is being taken away. When Peter is killed in the New Testament, he asks to be crucified, as Christ was, but crucified upside-down. Peter Sanza dies, like Robin, in a fall from Childress's roof. Robin fell to his death feet first, and Peter Sanza chooses to follow Robin, but head first instead.

Gillian is possibly another "coined name," likely derived from the Gaelic "gille" or "gillie," which refers to a servant, or else a variation on Julianna.

Even the title of the film holds a deeper connotation in myth. Most critics, and even some of the film's promotional material, assume that "the fury" refers to a specific power held by Robin and passed on to Gillian. In light of the roots of other names in the film in myth and folklore, a closer look is called for.

In Greek and Roman mythology, a fury was a snake-haired woman who pursued evildoers and inflicted madness. The name is traditionally used for any avenging spirit, which is Gillian's obvious function. After the film's violent climax, we can see that Gillian has passed from innocent virgin — the servant/follower — to an avenging spirit. By the film's end, Gillian has become *The Fury*.

Daniel DePrez



Fiona Lewis and John Cassavetes in *The Fury*.

unity that is to remain psychic, for it will be constantly frustrated by the machinations of Childress (note his name, with the world "child" followed by the harsh sound of the "ress"). One may also remember the dialogue spoken by Gillian to her friend the first time we see her, in that beautiful crane shot (which matches the beauty, not only of the crane shots themselves, but of the whole sordid atmosphere around the El) along the beach, in which they talk about the trouble their parents cause them. Gillian says, "They just don't know how to let go." Peter eventually lets go of his son at the film's climax, against his will, but by then his son is lost to him in many ways, driven mad by the supposed loss of his father, and the inhuman, greedy environment into which he is thrust. Peter and Robin are not on the roof so that De Palma can mimic once again the art of Hitchcock. Rather, all through the film Peter has been associated with heights, and it is fitting that it is from a height (that which he has handled so well elsewhere in the film) that he loses his son, and kills himself, in terms of the general melodramatic tragedy of the ending.

It appears that we have a theme, something that gives consistency to the uses made of technique. Cassavetes's destruction at the end of the film comes not so much because of his evil, important as that is, but because he says, "I'll be a good father to you, you can depend on that." Given the

complex feelings the parent-child relationship induces in the film (as well as "real" life), this is the most evil, hideous statement he could have made to Gillian. Earlier in the film, in a beautifully understated scene, the tensions between Gillian and her mother are realized, in a setting familiar in De Palma's films (a "theme" as Alakine would sarcastically have it), the young girl in bed, with the mother standing nearby, sometimes protectively, in this case not. Both *Sisters* and *Carrie* end with this type of scene. De Palma comes from an upper middle-class background, and though he seems to have ambivalent, mostly negative feelings for this class (he can satirize them mercilessly), nonetheless, for these scenes he reserves some of his most poignant moments. I find it particularly so when Gillian turns her head to the left, the camera pans slightly to the left to follow her, and frames her with a 8x10 of her mother, sitting on the nightstand, posed in a profile like Gillian's.

I imagine in the long run that it is just a matter of taste; where I see art, Ken Alakine sees trash. He seems to be highly concerned about the abuse the audience is put through, but every time I have seen the film, the audience has enjoyed it immensely. I think that audiences are more detached from films than certain "moral" critics, and I'm not convinced that the morals of the audience are eaten away by what they see. It is a matter, I think, of Ken

Alakine finding in De Palma a manifestation of his own pessimism and not caring for it very much. He is right to raise the moral questions he does. In Robin Wood's introduction to the third edition of *Hitchcock's Films*, of which Alakine seems so relentlessly ignorant, much the same issue is raised concerning the "puppeteership" Alakine attributes to De Palma. I am thinking of the full paragraph that appears on page 16. This distinction between open and closed directors is interesting, but a film-makers's style is often used against him, much as, in literature, Nabokov's style is used against him to "prove" that he has no feelings. As Andrew Sarris has written, about *Lolita*: "Nabokov's novels are often slighted with the snap judgement that they possess style without feeling, as if style could ever be conceived without feeling." Hitchcock, Nabokov, Kubrick—these are people with whom *Cinemonkey* will deal in the future, especially on this topic of "sincere style."

The first shot of the film is described as "boring." My working out of the film is itself incomplete. I don't know what the shot "means." Nor do I know what the first shot of *La Règle du Jeu* "means" in terms of the film that follows. This does not make me dislike the shot, illcomposed or long as it may be. In other words (and perhaps this is wrong) I give the artist the benefit of the doubt. If the film is Jacobean in its carnage, perhaps the film is Jacobean. It is true that the film is heavily plotted, but I like that, nowadays when films are "character studies" like Altman's moronic films. *The Fury*, because of its dense plot, gives incidence a greater chance to resonate, like a clear voice in a canyon. Resonance, repetition, are the sources of some of the most exquisite feelings for the reader or viewer. The car chase through the construction site, where the CIA men fire at Peter, and their bullets make sparks among the hardware, reminds me of the later scene where, as Robin walks through the indoor carnival, intent upon revenge, the power of his psychic concentration causes electrical fixtures to spark as he passes.

Though I defend the film, this does not mean that there aren't passages that displease me. The whole climactic sequence (where Susan's death can be seen as irony, she being the one of many of the "villians" who, because of their compassion, like Dr. McKeever,

are destroyed in some small or grand way. Childress, not Robin, kills Susan) seems to me also to be illrealized and rushed, but for a clear purpose: to insure the evil of Childress for the coming moment when he is destroyed by Gillian. There are many types of scenes in *The Fury*, as Alakine has listed them, but I think De Palma does most of them well. I have always thought, to carry my family analogy further, that De Palma's villains were father-figures (though this is a bit hard to prove with *Carrie*): their omnipotence is too fantastical to be real. It is more of a child's idea of evil, which does not account for divisiveness amongst those who conspire. In a film as packed as *The Fury*, in which so many characters come and go, it is no surprise when one of them, in this case Cassavetes, does not come off well as an actor.

For the most part the film is very well acted and photographed (by Richard H. Kline). John William's score is his best in a long time for a suspense film, and once again the editing of Paul Hirsch, a crucial member of De Palma's team, is clean and precise. All in all a successful film, and this viewer, for one, looks forward to De Palma's version of Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man* and his more forthcoming light comedy.

Gabriel Conroy

Jaws2

This sequel to the second most popular film in the history of American movies offers several points of critical interest if one wants to analyze the film as an artifact, rather than a work of art, which it most certainly is not. It is understandable that Zanuck and Brown would like to repeat their success, and this new film (hereafter *II*) is an attractive product; the script has structural flaws, but is essentially a competent genre entertainment plot; the photography is excellent; the acting by the principals is never less than adequate and at many moments is quite good. At the core of this film, however, is a rottenness by the name of Jeannot Szwarc who, rather than utilizing these beautiful materials as would an artist were he stuck in the same director's chair, instead, because of his lack of imagination, draws the life from the film, rendering it just more of the same for a market which knows fundamentally what it is getting for its money. I shall draw the predict-

able parallel between *Jaws* and *II* to illustrate my point.

In *Jaws* Richard Dreyfuss, as Matt Hooper, descends into the night water to investigate an islander's half-sunk ship. Within the torn bow he finds an enormous shark's tooth. From a camera position within the ship we see Dreyfuss look around nervously. We remember the previous deaths and are concerned for this character for whom we have developed some, perhaps mitigated, affection. Another shot as his beam of light strafes the camera lens, and then another, if memory serves. From over his shoulder the camera frames him as he returns to the hole to search further; at this point the decayed carcass of the islander slides into view. The shock in the eyes of Dreyfuss reflects that of the manipulated audience.

And if I may praise it, the manipulation is perfect. We are misdirected in a Hitchcockian sense (indeed, the dead man resembles the farmer Dan Fawcett whom Lydia finds in *The Birds*, only one of many references to master directors such as Ford, Hitchcock, Lang, and Hawks) in that we expect the shark to attack Dreyfuss. The music plays no small part in this scene and the framing is tight on Dreyfuss as he searches the water behind him, narrowing our vision. In the context of film suspense technique we expect the shark to leap upon him from off-camera. This is not just a "shocking" scene, however, for certain thematic concerns are also present. The Dreyfuss character, for all his education, is unprepared for the unexpected, and he incompetently drops the shark's tooth in a panic. He never overcomes his incompetency, and this is another stage in the movement of "fear of Nature" elements that allows Brody, the man afraid of the water and the ordinary-man hero (that is, someone without specialized knowledge), to overcome his resistance to Nature and destroy the shark. The shock, though understandably great, is something to which Hooper over-reacts as he over-reacts to other shocks and aggressive behavior throughout the film. The general project of Being in Nature/Being an Islander vs. Having Specialized Knowledge with Brody poised in the middle underlies the suspense and gives the scene meaning beyond the manipulation. It is "Hitchcockian" manipulation because it is the same format of Set-up/Audience realization of Set-up/Surprise comes from some

other, unnoticed Set-up used with variations throughout his career. In *The Trouble with Harry* the swinging door of a closet is the Set-up. We are led to believe that Harry is there by John Forsythe's concern that Royal Dano not open the door; the door swings open, Harry is in fact not there, the bathroom door is opened and Harry can be seen in repose in the bath, in eyeshot of Dano were he to turn around. This technique is also used to its apotheosis in the Hitchcock influenced (in fact more Hitchcockian than even Hitchcock) episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* entitled "The Open Window."

Szwarc is also a student of Hitchcock, but a very poor one. Nonetheless a formula is developing in the *Jaws* series, and in *II* we have a scene which in intention resembles the already-described scene in *Jaws*. Here we have Brody driving along the beach after his investigation of the boating death of two young women in which he had the first inkling of another shark. He notices some green-painted wood floating in the surf, stops, and gets out to retrieve it. A long shot from his right as he hesitates before the waves at his feet. He takes off his shoes and enters the water. Another long shot, now from beyond the surf, a shark's POV, and we hear the familiar shark theme music; the only memorable portion of John Williams's generally undistinguished score — written, of course, for the previous film. At any rate we are led to believe that the shark is out there as Brody enters the water and finds, rather than the shark, the charred ruins of one of the young women now clinging to the boat fragment. Again we have the misdirection, but notice with what listlessness it has been executed: put Brody on the beach for no reason, play a few notes of music, and there is a scene. Needless to add, there is no thematic underpinning.

The two cinematic importances of the film are (1) the general idea of sequels, pre-quels and co-quels, and how the audience responds to them, and (2) the fact that here we have a film made fundamentally by the same team as those who made *Jaws*, sans one important member: the director, Spielberg, who made *Jaws* a masterpiece. Now with Spielberg out and a mediocrity in, we can come more readily to understand just what Spielberg's presence did to make *Jaws* what it is, a presence which can be felt in other of his films with such elements as dinner

table crises (where the love felt between Brody and his son is communicated with such poignance), the use of reflecting surfaces, the cat and mouse chase, and, on the craftsmanship side, the beauty and vividness of the photography (more striking in *Jaws* than in *II*), the excellent sense of structure, camera placement and cutting. Compare in the mind the highs and lows of *Jaws* with that of *II*, whose pace is so turgid. Notice in *Jaws* the sharpness with which secondary characters are introduced, made memorable, and leave, never to return, such as the two men who throw the roast off the dock — whose faces we in fact never see. In *II* one has trouble keeping straight the various teenagers who figure so significantly in the climax. These quick notes will lead, I hope, to a more detailed comparison in the future.

One would also like to see more on the subject of sequels in terms of audience response. It would seem that sequels to popular films would also be popular, but this is not always the case. The public's need for familiarity, which manifests itself in such enterprises as hamburger franchises that vary little from state to state (being more comfortable than someplace new and, therefore, dangerous) as well as the television series, with its maddening repetition not only from episode to episode, but also from network to network, all appear to outweigh the feeling of exploitation.

As I've indicated there is a tentative effort to formularize *Jaws* in its sequel. Let us hope that the formula does not ultimately sour that which came first.

N.O. Grace

An Unmarried Woman

An Unmarried Woman has received some of the most favorable New York reviews given any American film in several years. In many ways, this is not surprising; the film is beautifully cast, acted — most conspicuously by Jill Clayburgh as the title character Erica — and directed by Paul Mazursky, from his own witty, inventive screenplay.

In addition, *Woman's* subject, the dislocations of a sudden divorce, is an almost universal experience, but has rarely been explored in a contemporary film in a thoughtful, unsentimental way. (*Annie Hall*, in some ways a companion piece to *Woman*, focuses on a relationship, rather than its after-



An Unmarried Woman: Director Paul Mazursky and Jill Clayburgh.

math.)

Many of the strengths of *An Unmarried Woman* are unusual rather than unique. It explores friendship among women, no longer the screen taboo it once was, with warmth and compassion. Further, it is masterful in its use of character actors, those individuals whose distinguishing qualities — in acting or appearance — uniquely suit them to play specific types of roles. The Wall Street sincerity of Michael Murphy as the guy who desperately wants people to believe him even though he never quite believes himself, is hardly a discovery — Altman has used it in some form in nearly half a dozen films — but it is perfect for the well-intentioned, likeable, empty husband here. Mazursky also has a fine eye for visual details as small and telling as the clock in a therapist's office. Even *Woman's* upbeat ending, so uncharacteristic of an intelligent film in the apocalyptic cinema of the 70s, is not unique (cf. Jonathan Demme's *Citizen's Band*).

In at least two important respects, the compassion it shows for the trauma of separation, and the sensitivity with which it views the world from a woman's point of view, *Woman* is unique. As Erica adjusts to being single, her confusion, numbness, pain, and anger all become part of the fabric of the film. There are even moments when we sense the horrifying desolation, the loss of self-esteem — almost of identity — that can come from being

suddenly rejected by a long-time spouse.

Mazursky shows us the world as Erica sees it, from her agonizing walk away from her rejecting husband to her joy in a too-lyrical ice skating sequence. Perhaps the most telling vignette in the film is a maniac 3:45 a.m. gesture of revenge, as Erica collects her husband's remaining belongings and throws her wedding ring (which almost doesn't come off) onto the pile. Here, as elsewhere, the film shows her loss of perspective toward herself, her emotions, and to men in general, without patronizing or sentimentalizing her, or losing sight of the temporary nature of her anguish.

Mazursky is a master of using the same actions (a man stepping in dogshit, a group of friends sitting together) in different situations, as a measure of change. Erica meets with her friends several times, but each meeting "feels" different. In one they exchange gossip, in another, numb grief, in a third, help and support.

Perhaps the most conspicuous repetition is of Erica and her husband, talking as she jogs: in the first sequence, they quarrel and decide to make love; in the second, after the separation, she is so angry she refuses to talk with him; and in the third, he asks for a reconciliation and she, by now released from the love that would make her want him back and from the anger that would give her pleasure from rejecting him, refuses, politely but firmly. Each

sequence has its own purpose, but the three, taken together, mark Erica's spiritual evolution.

The film ends on a gratifyingly tentative note, as Erica equivocally rejects the protection of a charming macho lover for the more uncertain rewards of independence. With the final sequence, Mazursky celebrates with the same combination of irony and respect that he has shown throughout the film, Erica's resourcefulness and her self-confidence.

David Coursen

The Buddy Holly Story

Of interest in *The Buddy Holly Story* is the performance of Gary Busey, which has deservedly attracted much attention. Not so the film, which strikes one as a drive-in movie suddenly embarrassed to find itself opening at the Cinema 1, and not knowing what to do with itself. The plot is predictable show-biz stuff: Buddy in the back seat of a car writing "Peggy Sue" but using a different name (but we know...); a cricket in his studio/garage interrupts their playing; in a mythical opening at the Apollo they win over the hostile crowd (a star is born); Buddy's tragic death just as the other members of his group want to reunite; and so on. The acting is mostly adequate, except for Buddy's wife, played by Maria Richwine, who is awful, the photography has that drive-in flatness to it, and the music... well. Director Steve Rash does a lot with the low production values; he clearly has the itch, but not the scratch.

Gloria Heifetz

Iphigenia

Michael Cacoyannis, director of *Electra* (1962) and *The Trojan Women* (1971), has perhaps for the first time successfully brought the feel of ancient Greek theatre to the screen. *Iphigenia* (1977) is based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, a story of an incident just prior to the Trojan War. Helen has run off to Troy with Paris. Agamemnon, brother to Menaleus, Helen's husband, will lead the Greek armies to the shores of Troy. But at the Bay of Aulis the armies wait for winds to carry their boats to Troy. This is where the film begins.

Cacoyannis establishes in just a few minutes of film exposition the restlessness of the Greek armies waiting on the Aulis shore. The men of the armies feel

as though the lack of wind were the fault of Agamemnon. The men are tired and hungry, and aching to go into battle. To feed the men, Agamemnon directs soldiers to kill the sheep kept by the holy men who attend the temple of Diana, but the sacred hart is accidentally slain. An oracle is delivered to Agamemnon soon after by Calchas the priest of the temple of Diana. For the wind to blow, Agamemnon must offer up a sacrifice. The armies are jubilant, but what they do not know, and what Agamemnon, Menaleus, Odysseus and Calchas know a few moments after the announcement to the men, is that Agamemnon must sacrifice the first-born daughter, Iphigenia.

Agamemnon sends a message to Argos calling for Iphigenia under the pretense that she is traveling to Aulis to wed Achilles, a leader of one of the small armies participating in the Trojan siege. Clytemnestra, against her husband's instructions, will escort Iphigenia to Aulis for the wedding.

From this point in the film to the climax, the pacing, the unfolding of the tragedy is very taut. This quality accents the stunning performances of the principal actors and actresses and so effectively conveys the mood of Greek theatre. Clytemnestra finds out the truth shortly after arriving as does Iphigenia herself. Achilles is astounded by the treachery that has involved him in this tragedy, while Odysseus and Calchas threaten to inform the army of the nature of the oracle if Agamemnon does not follow through with what he has committed himself to.

Once the basic structure has been laid (and this Cacoyannis does well, taking some intelligent liberties with the Euripides play) the tragedy builds upon itself at a constant, irrevocable pace. One of the changes includes Cacoyannis's de-emphasizing the importance of the Chorus of Players traditionally used to provide explanatory narrative before and after key scenes. Such a move is simply cinematic common sense. A straightforward presentation of the play with the choral interludes would be foreign to the vital tone and pace of the film. The story itself can be said to have been very carefully unravelled from the Euripides version and then placed in a very logical, strictly chronological framework so the story may better fit contemporary methods of (cinematic) story-telling.

As the climax comes to its culmination, Iphigenia walks up the hillside

steps to the altar where she is to be sacrificed, Agamemnon watching, with the army of men, helpless on the steps below. As she reaches the top, Agamemnon (and we the audience) becomes aware of the wind beginning to rise. Agamemnon bounds up the steps and as he reaches the altar we see only his face as he reacts to what we might assume is the sight of dead Iphigenia. Yet in the Euripides play, on the sacrificial altar a miracle happens; Iphigenia has been transformed into a mountain hind (deer). Perhaps the goddess Diana has taken a hind from Agamemnon for the hart he took from her. Regardless of the interpretation of the individual viewer Cacoyannis has chosen to leave the ending somewhat open. We, not having the eyes of Agamemnon, can never quite know what happened to Iphigenia on that sacrificial altar.

As I have already said, the acting in *Iphigenia* is first-rate, particularly Irene Papas as Clytemnestra and Tatiana Papamoukou as Iphigenia. The locales and the photography by George Arvanitis (especially the interior and night scenes) are tremendous mood-setters (and vaguely remind me of the look of the Italian *Hercules* films of the early sixties, though no qualitative comparison is intended). Cacoyannis and crew can be nothing but very proud of this handsome, powerful film.

David Waich

Big Wednesday

With the year virtually over, a handful of American films have emerged as fine, even great, and in the forefront of these is the *Big Wednesday* of John Milius. The film is stunning. The photography by Bruce Surtees, with surfing scenes produced by Greg MacGillivray, is excellent, the acting is top-notch, etc. In other words, all the reviewer concepts can be appreciated for what they are. The film is more than the sum of its easily accountable virtues; production values the daily reviewers can not even bring themselves to acknowledge.

The structure of the film is reminiscent of Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* in tone, that is, with an opening section introducing the various characters in an idyllic period of their lives, followed by a succession of sobering and dissipating incidents. One scene attacked by the daily reviewers is the "Fordian" brawl at Jack's home, which is played for laughs and in

which they see no humor. Apparently the reviewers were made to see red; they certainly didn't see Milius's almost immediate refutation of that scene, which takes place in Tijuana, and in which Matt, involved in another brawl that turns ugly with knives and gunshots, is suddenly awakened to adulthood, where what he formerly took to be fun is taken quite seriously. The whole movement of the film is toward the acceptance of adulthood ("Taxes, marriage, divorce — the whole damn mess"), some accepting, some rejecting, but all mourning the passing of the time where they didn't have to think about it.

All except Jack, who was "born old" in a phrase used to describe him taken from *The Searchers*. There are many references to Ford and other directors, but, unlike other films and directors in this homage-ridden age, there is never any sense that the references are imposed on the film. There are other Ford references: the talk over Waxer's grave, the brawl I've mentioned, and the presence of Hank Worden (Mose Harper in *The Searchers* and the character about whom the above quoted line was spoken). The final march to the surf with its alternation of close shots of the characters with long shots of surfers wiping out reminds one of Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch*, as does the use of the Mexican locale, where Milius makes his second appearance in the film, selling marijuana (the first is in a photograph under his directorial credit). Again, the references arise out of the action naturally, so that a viewer need not feel he isn't "getting" something if he is unfamiliar with the source film.

The most frequent complaint made against the film is that the subjects, the surfers, are not worth the effort. They are adolescent, "Aryan," their troubles are not as important as, say, a Negro's in Harlem (this same complaint is often heard about Erica in *An Unmarried Woman*). This is tantamount to saying that there are certain people artists cannot make movies about. This is facism, not what Milius puts on the screen. A character is worth our attention because of the film he is in, because of what the director has made of him, not because of the preconceived notions of the viewer. Milius is giving, or trying to give, grandeur to "simple" people, everyday people, without the baggage of induced ideology. One cannot dictate to an artist his content, one can only evaluate it according to



Big Wednesday: William Katt, Gary Busey, and Jan-Michael Vincent.

structural rules inherent in the film itself; in other words, moral standards.

One further complaint is that there are no women in the film. Much of what I have just said applies to this criticism as well, I think. The film is not *about* women, it is about certain men, in a certain time. Milius chose not to focus on women in this film. He is not incapable of conceiving strong women, as he has shown in *The Wind and the Lion*. And the central relationship, between Jan-Michael Vincent and Lee Purcell, is wonderfully conjured and understated. (One woman newspaper reviewer I know of was so incensed, apparently, by the sexism of the film that she was struck dumb — dumb enough to lift most of her key ideas from Stephen Farber's *New West* review.)

One of the things I admire most about *Big Wednesday* is the maturity of this relationship. Matt is the character most troubled by the passing of the years, and Peggy understands the sadness and anger he has. Near the film's end, as Matt, early in the morning, puts his board in the car and starts off for the swell that gives the film its name, Peggy appears in the door. There is a cut to her as she asks him where he is going. Matt says that there is a good swell, he thought he'd go surfing. She tells him simply to be careful. He smiles at her and gets into

the car. It is a simple and beautiful moment. She does not nag him, he is not an insensible brute; they respond to each other as individuals, and respect each others individuality.

There are so many good scenes in this film, so many good lines, the music, by Basil Poledouris is moving and brilliant, and, as mentioned before, the acting is excellent. There are many emotional, poignant moments in the film, and the viewer, if he is not predisposed against it, can be moved deeply. *Big Wednesday*, though deeply flawed in many ways, does not deserve, because of its valuable, fragile moments, the scorn and indifference it has so far received.

Ken Alakine

Blue Country

The splinters of *Blue Country* fly everywhere. There is no development, no over-view, no intelligence. The one-dimensional characters appear again and again, monotoning the same dialogue, riding the same hobbyhorse, to no artistic end. We are clearly meant to applaud the "warm" and "touching" "humanity" of these nonentities, but rather, we are perplexed as to why so much time is spent telling their stories. This country tale of misfits with no felt past begins with a pre-credit sequence focusing on three of the more unimpor-



The Choirboys: Tim McIntire and director Robert Aldrich.

tant of them, two of which sink into immediate anonymity (they zoom off in a car toward the middle of the film with about a half a line of explanatory dialogue). The principal actor, Jacques Serres, is rendered a physical brute, and several minutes of screen time are wasted on a predictable "gag" sequence of him beating up the wrong man as a favor for a suicidal friend. The main thrust of the film eventually turns out to be the relationship between Serres and the ravishing Brigitte Fossey, which is crisis-ridden with the problem of whether or not to get married. They don't, and remain free and happy, unlike almost every other couple in the film. Jean-Charles Tacchella bends the truth of human experience to fit his didactic intentions. Fossey gives a performance which resonates well with the essential childishness of her character, perhaps unwittingly. The general contemptuousness of the film, the chaos of images, rivals only *Cousin, Cousine* for mediocrity.

Johannes Lucas

The Choirboys

Robert Aldrich may well be the most underrated American director working in the seventies. On the surface, this is puzzling, since Aldrich's work has some obvious merits, not the least of which are a vivid, aggressive visual style and an exceptional consistency and coherence of theme and characterization.

Further, Aldrich has, for at least a decade apparently, retained almost complete control over his career, choosing his projects and making his films without outside interference. Even when, in the late sixties and early seventies, a series of financial disasters destroyed his production company, he stubbornly struggled to retain his independence, finally making two moneymakers, *The Longest Yard* (1974) and *Hustle* (1975), to go with his earlier successes, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967).

Despite this evidence of integrity and commitment to personal filmmaking, Aldrich is appreciated as an artist only by a handful of cult admirers. More than once, a new Aldrich film has been reviewed superficially as if it were a piece of commercial hack-work. Ironically, it is probably the force and integrity with which Aldrich renders his vision on the screen that, more than anything else, encourages his neglect; he is not a likeable director, and his world is an extraordinarily unpleasant place.

Violence and treachery are not uncommon in action films, but most directors undercoat the bleakness with sentimentality, often in the form of a romanticized central character. Aldrich, however, sees a world where heroism can no longer exist (one of his films is revealingly titled *Too Late The Hero*). His characters often have few choices; a man betrays his friends in

The Choirboys, and a U.S. President conceals a major scandal and connives in his own assassination in *Twilight's Last Gleaming*. In *Hustle*, a man is ludicrous and pathetic when he tries to play the hero and avenge his daughter's death; the closest thing to heroism in the film is a cop's effort to conceal the sordid murder the would-be hero finally commits.

If Aldrich often rejects and invariably undercuts traditional types of heroism, he is no more receptive to the heroes of the seventies. American football-worship is the subject of apparently good-natured satire in *The Longest Yard*. In *Hustle*, however, when a man is called away from a football game to identify his daughter's body, the incessant sound of that game, coming from a series of nearby radios seems to mock the tragedy the man must face; in the process, the sound unforgettably objectifies the world's utter, almost malevolent indifference.

The more sophisticated myths of the seventies get the same Aldrich treatment. Perhaps the director's most telling refusal to romanticize is in his 1972 cavalry western *Ulzana's Raid*. In typical seventies fashion, the film features a callow officer who, acting as a kind of liberal mouthpiece, suggests that Indians have been systematically brutalized and oppressed; hence their violence must be understood. But Aldrich is not debunking one mythic hero, the noble cavalryman, merely to create a more modern equivalent, the Noble (peace-loving) Savage. Instead, *Ulzana's Raid*, despite its modern perspective, is unsparing in its depiction of both the brutality and the martial skills of its marauding Indians.

In *Ulzana*, as elsewhere, Aldrich describes men caught within larger processes that are beyond their control. The actions of each individual may be important to him and those around him but are futile as attempts to control the situation. The integrity of Burt Reynolds's cop in *Hustle*, or the patriotism of Burt Lancaster's missile base hijacker or the decency of Charles Durning's president in *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977's best film), are meaninglessly overwhelmed by the pervasive immorality of their societal and political contexts.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Aldrich has created some of the most devastating final images in the American cinema. *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) concludes with the sound of an endless

scream as an A-bomb explodes. In some ways, the final shot in *Twilight's Last Gleaming* is even more agonizing as the camera recedes from a slain American President surrounded by symbols of the militarism that has demanded his life.

Thus it is not surprising either that Aldrich's newest film, *The Choirboys*, though billed as a "comedy," is not very funny. Aldrich has a malicious sense of irony, but his feel for the nuances of comedy is erratic. As a result, the film's weakest moments are often those when it is most conspicuously laboring to be funny; a parking lot traffic jam, obviously and ineptly plagiarized from *Nashville*, is one glaring example.

But if *The Choirboys* (the name refers to a group of Los Angeles cops who hold choir practices — drunken debauches — in a city park) fails as comedy, it is more than redeemed by its characteristic Aldrich strengths. It is most effective in the force with which it suggests the treachery of the choirboys' working environment. In fact, one reason the film is not particularly funny is that Aldrich is never unmindful of the consequences of the ways the policemen exercise their power. The choirboys may be no worse than ordinary men, but in their jobs that makes them dangerous, to themselves and to others.

As a result, the film's humor often has perverse overtones. When a psychotic patrolman talks tough to his partner, his brutal descriptions may be grotesquely humorous. But when he talks tough to a potential suicide, thereby persuading her to jump, the humor pales. Later, with a swaggering machismo that is almost terrifying, the same man turns a minor domestic quarrel into a near riot, in which he is finally beaten with a violence that is disturbingly cathartic; for this act, he receives a special citation.

In short, the film is typical Aldrich. It is other, less brutal choirboys who fail each other, and who become involved in sadomasochism, suicide, and murder. Finally the oldest and wisest of the group, "Spermwhale" Whalen (Charles Durning, in a brilliant performance), six months from retirement, saves himself and his pension by betraying his fellow officers. Despite an ambiguous final reversal, it is clear here, as in all of Aldrich, that the well-intentioned, no less than the brutal, can be destroyed. Heroes don't survive. Too late the hero.

David Coursen

Operation Thunderbolt

Considered solely as a cinematic entity, without attention to its source event, the political world in general, or the low financial freedom of the film industry in Israel, *Operation Thunderbolt* serves as a paradigm of all that can go wrong in the technique of contemporary film-making. Visually the film is undistinctive, having no noticeable dissolves, fades, camera movement, or any other element of the cinematic vocabulary besides the zoom, which is used to excess, at one point three times in three brief, successive shots. The hand-held camera also adds to the viewer's eye-strain. All character's are allotted one line for their "development" and the music is repetitious and grating, giving the aural impression that one is watching a documentary on surfing. The script tumbles headlong into blase absurdity: two Ugandan women are talking in the airport, as all around them mingle the suffering passengers, and, in way of explanation, one says to the other, "You see, it's in God's hands now." The other replies with dead-pan finality, "Oh, I see." There are a few touches of interest, however, on the off chance one happens to see the picture: the unemphasized moment when the woman terrorist, having just been kissed by Amin, wipes her mouth; and Klaus Kinsky's spectacular, if momentary, death ballet.

Douglas Holm

Books

Hitchcock's Films, Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged, Robin Wood, A.S. Barnes, Cranbury, New Jersey, \$12.00.

Luis Buñuel, New Revised and Enlarged Edition, Raymond Durnat, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, \$4.95.

John Ford, New Revised and Enlarged Edition, Peter Bogdanovich, University of California Press, \$4.95.

The problem, as these revisions of three of the more significant film books of the sixties show, of writing about directors who still live, is that they will make new films and the book may become dated. As it happens, Ford's

film career was virtually over when Bogdanovich's book came out, and one never had the sense, while reading Wood's book, that it was in any sense "dated" even at ten years of age; Durnat's book was still lively, but so was Buñuel, and one was anxious to read what Durnat had to say about the new films. All in all, the changes are very slight. Bogdanovich adds a new introduction and corrects the filmography and bibliography: a film is added here (*The Red, White and Blue Line*) and subtracted there (*So Alone*) and the credits of some films are expanded or corrected. New books and films about Ford are added. Durnat updates the filmography and bibliography and adds short articles on four of the five newest Buñuel films (the book is already "dated"). Durnat's little pieces have a "rewrite from mood" air to them, since they are not as long as the pieces he did on the same films for *Film Comment* from July 1974 on. He has not chosen to reprint those articles, probably because of space limitations. Since both books have been long out-of-print, however, it is good to have them back and accessible to newer readers.

Robin Wood's book is much the same but for a new chapter at the start called "Retrospective." The inclusion of this chapter gives the book a truer sense of "revision" than the other two, because Wood's thinking has shifted subtly over the years. He has not altered the text of the book, but rather offered his new thinking at the start, so that it hangs like an invisible critic over one's shoulder while rereading the rest of the book, so significant in my past as in that of other people I know.

On this personal note, and before moving on to the text of this chapter, I want to say that I felt the best flush of cinema-related embarrassment of quite some time by one germ of a fact contained in the first paragraph of this additional chapter. Honesty compels me to admit that I was completely taken in by the article "Lost in the Wood" by "George Kaplan" in *Film Comment* (November, 1972, pp 46-53). At the time, the author's name struck an ironic note in this reader's mind: Kaplan is the name of the nonexistent spy in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. Little did the idolatrous reader realize the barely disguised stylistic similarities between Wood himself and his harsh critic, the mysterious G. Kaplan, never heard from again in the pages of any film magazine. Nor did Wood

himself, not one to shrug off an attack, demand equal time in the pages of *Film Comment*. Rather, he merely acknowledges Kaplan in an article in the March 1973 *Film Comment* on Mizoguchi (page 40). The fact, as Wood admits on page 11 of the new work, that he is "Kaplan" drives one back to the article with a sheepish grin stretched across the critical sensibility, where one reads, and has one's foolishness compounded, in the brief biographical note, the following words: "George Kaplan, a retired government employee, teaches film at Archibald Leach Junior College, in South Dakota." Leach, of course, is the real name of Cary Grant, and South Dakota, and its famous landmark Mt. Rushmore, is the playground for the whole final movement of *North by Northwest*. Congratulations to Robin Wood and Richard Corliss for being tight-lipped this long, and to Wood himself for being his best, most irrefutable critic.

I will not pretend to be able to evaluate the content of this new chapter, but I do wish to summarize it in order to get at just how Wood's estimation of Hitchcock has altered since the book first came out, and how Wood's critical outlook has changed in general. To begin with, how would the book be different if he were to write it today. I think it would be different in two ways. First, because, as he writes in the first paragraph, "nothing in it would be quite the same — not because I wish totally to reject or retract what I wrote then, but because I would be writing...within a very different phase in the development of film criticism," the book would probably lose its polemical tone, which is not offensive, but is simply indicative of the time in which it was written, when criticism was in the middle stages of a major upheaval. He would be, if I may say, less defensive of Hitchcock, of his taking Hitchcock seriously, because in the development of criticism since then, it has been shown that Hitchcock should be taken seriously. Now Wood can express certain qualms or questions about Hitchcock's art (which he wasn't necessarily suppressing at the time). Secondly, there would be less reliance (and he has been very clear on this point) on "auteur" criticism. "Auteur" criticism has been too readily content to stop short at the identification of recurrent traits and the celebration of personal signature...I am inclined, as time goes on, to talk less about great

artists and more about great works." To quote from a *Take One* review he wrote of Maurice Yacowar's *Hitchcock's British Films*: "The great overall lesson that the progress of film criticism over the last decade has to teach is that an analysis which ignores the 'social and political contexts' within which a film was made is certain to be impoverished and likely to be misleading." And: "Auteurism fosters the temptation to fall from criticism into 'appreciation' — instead of attempting to define the nature of a given work, the critic tells us what is good about it...the critic forfeits any overall view of the artist's limitations, which define him as surely as his qualities...Interpretations, lacking adequate contextualization...become dubious, strained, arbitrary."

Wood spends the first third of the opening essay giving "a more precise and concrete definition of the nature of Hitchcock's art" which he feels the book did not originally do. He begins with a discussion of the two main influences on Hitchcock: Expressionism and Solviet montage. Because Expressionism deals with a distortion of reality to represent inner states, and montage was employed in "the creation of concepts that have no necessary phenomenological equivalents in what was actually presented before the camera," Hitchcock's cinema is highly artificial, constructed from borrowed cinematic principles that have nothing to do with the purposes to which he puts them. This leads eventually to an evaluation of Hitchcock as a closed director as opposed to Renoir, McCarey and Hawks, but for the time being he is simply describing such facets as its elongation of time, its cartoon-like quality, and general lack of reality (there is a good appraisal of the *Notorious* key-stealing scene in terms of what the audience *doesn't* think about as they watch it). Next he spends some time analysing the Hitchcock of the interviews in terms of what Hitchcock says about the Kuleshov experiment with the actor Mosjoukin (and the crude nature of the emotions supplied by audience identification) and his consideration of actors as cattle. Hitchcock is image-centered, not actor-centered, and because of this bias "I find that Hitchcock's films go 'dead' on me more easily." He wraps up this third section with a striking description of the opening of *Marnie* in terms of its image-centeredness, and

what the idea of a "set-piece" really means (which is montage), and though it calls for an amount of pre-planning, which can enthrall the spectator, it can also be easily "deconstructed."

It has become clear, and he admits it about most of the films, that Wood's enthusiasm for Hitchcock has diminished. He writes at the beginning of the section that this would be the obvious conclusion in the old style of criticism, as well as the semiological school, which denies within its school the validity of dealing with personal creativity. He puts aside for the time-being his personal response, and instead develops an interesting idea: that the "manifest desire to control audiences" is a thematic extension of his inner life, "in other words, not simply by conscious commercial strategy but by powerful internal drives and pressures of the kind that never operate exclusively on a conscious level." The "look" is used to show the actual diversity of the identification in Hitchcock's films, particularly *Notorious*, and an evaluation is made that Hitchcock is better, more personally engaged, when there is this diversity; the idea of the "look" and the omnipotence/helplessness structure is shown to inform all of Hitchcock's major films. The therapeutic theme still holds for the better films, but Wood now feels the need to discriminate more sharply between the failures and the films that transcend Hitchcock's limitations. His limitations are: (1) the gray areas between the two extremes of Hitchcock as artist and panderer, where he habitually undercuts the implications of his films; and (2) the lack of a normative impulse, the great possibility that Hitchcock isn't even interested in normality. "That great art strives — however implicitly — towards the realization of norms seems to me axiomatic," he writes, and offers as two examples *Tout va bien* and *The Silence*, as films "rooted in a sense of at least a *potential* normality to be striven for." Hitchcock is good at creating a Hell but poor at imagining a Heaven. Finally Wood reevaluates *The Birds* again, his ideas having always fluctuated on this film.

The last third of the essay deals with Hitchcock's three films since 1968. Wood's appraisal of *Topaz* is especially cogent, and though *Frenzy* has a certain cynical solidity to it, it too suffers from the lack of any concept of lived normality. *Family Plot* is marginal. "Hitchcock's finest films are

all very much Hitchcock's — they would be unimaginable without him — but they are no *more* personal than *Frenzy* (and many others). Their greatness depends on the particular direction given to the individual by the material — and sometimes on the restraints the material imposes on certain personal tendencies." I have spent so much time on these 34 paragraphs because I think that it is one of the most significant pieces on film to be written in some time. So many ideas, possibilities, insights are packed into a little space (and I strongly urge the reader to read the essay, if not the whole book, for himself, in order to erase the inevitable distortions I may have wrought against Wood's piece), and the only way that such density could be achieved is through the beauty and clarity of Wood's prose; this is one aspect of his work which has never been acknowledged in public. Let us hope that the possession of the second edition of this book does not prevent the reader from seeking out the third.

Gabriel Conroy

André Bazin, Dudley Andrew, University of Oxford Press, New York, 1978, \$11.95.

The bare facts and thoughts of Bazin's short, "eventless" (as Truffaut apologetically calls it in his foreword) life are here in this small, attractive volume, from his birth on 18 April 1918 in Angers, to his death 40 years later at 3:00 A.M., 11 November 1958. In 1923 his parents moved to La Rochelle, where he entered the Christian Brothers Schools, the first of many influences on Bazin. He had taught himself to read, and developed a love of animals from dogs and cats to a baby crocodile he brought home with him one night in 1954 and a parrot he got at the São Paulo Film Festival, named "Coco," which he almost had to smuggle into the country. His reverence for nature later informed his writing on film. Andrew traces his intellectual development from the Christian Brothers to the Ecole Normale Supérieure at St. Cloud, from Henri Bergson to Charles DuBos, Charles Péguy, Albert Béguin, editor of *Esprit*, Emmanuel Mounier, Marcel Legaut, Roger Leenhardt, who later directed *Les Dernières Vacances*, to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, André Malraux and Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1939 Bazin's best friend at the time, Guy L  ger, whose parents owned a chain of

theaters, introduced him to movie history and theory.

After the start of the war, when Bazin's plans to become a teacher fell through, he organized film discussion groups, under the direction of the Maison des Lettres, headed by *Esprit's* drama critic Pierre-Aim   Touchard. His first cine-club was formed with Sorbonne student Jean-Pierre Chartier, getting films through an underground network. To encourage attendance of the discussions afterwards, Bazin invited guest lecturers, one of the first being Leenhardt. With audacity Bazin showed many Expressionist films, much to the pleasure of Alain Resnais, who was a bigger film fan than Bazin himself, and taught him many things. His first film articles appeared in small journals in 1943. Andrew's detailing of this phase is good, showing just what ideas Bazin had before he came to film, and how what he saw in cinema estatically confirmed his own philosophical orientation.

A period of intense activity carries him from the end of the war to the creation of *Cahiers du Cin  ma* in 1951, a time filled with political hostilities, the resurgence of American films in Paris, marriage in May 1949, and the birth of Neo-Realism. Bazin treaded dangerous ground by criticizing the image of Stalin in Soviet films and defending Renoir's American period. The first issue of *Cahiers* appeared in April 1951, created by Bazin with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and financed by Leonid Keigel. For me the *Cahiers* chapter is the most fascinating, dealing as it does with a vital time, straightening out many ill-remembered facts, and recounting the birth of *Auteurism*. Truffaut figures highly in this section, offending people with a personality we now forget once existed. The first piece he wrote for *Cahiers* was a review of David Miller's *Sudden Fear*, opening with the amusing appraisal of French cinema as "this: 300 touched-up shots matched so they link up end to end 110 times a year." We do not see anger like his anymore. Truffaut's history at *Cahiers* constitutes only pages 197 through 203, but the text comes alive with Truffaut's passion, and Bazin's sympathetic attempts to quiet him down a little. At Cannes in 1954 Bazin was diagnosed as having leukemia. The last four years of his life, filled with his friendships with Renoir, Bu  uel and many others, the festivals, and the preparation of *Qu'est-ce que le cin  ma?* make up the final chapter of

the book; Bazin died after the 90th issue of *Cahiers*.

Andrew's prose is solid and gentle, and though the book is short (253 pages), there is no sense of the events of the text being rushed. Bazin's life for us was a life of the mind, and it is in his writing where he lived and comes to life again. Andrew's is a curiously moving account, and he shows the example that Bazin's life should set, of devotion and tenacity, for anyone interested in film criticism.

Gabriel Conroy

The Postman Always Rings Twice Double Indemnity Serenade

Mildred Pierce
Vintage, \$1.75 each

By James M. Cain

...it was not good entertainment, but it passed the time. Movies pretty much affect me this way now.

— James M. Cain

Seldom has a writer described his own work so perceptively; had Cain merely substituted "the writings of James M. Cain" for "movies," his comments could stand as a definitive critical evaluation. Despite his reputation as a master of hard-boiled writing, Cain was a mediocre commercial writer, a cut above Mickey Spillane or Harold Robbins perhaps, but in no sense a peer of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, or Ernest Hemingway, to all of whom Cain has been, sometimes favorably, and always inappropriately compared. Cain's expression of contempt for movies is particularly ironic, since it is only the fine film adaptations of three of his least forgettable novels, *Mildred Pierce*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and *Double Indemnity* (the last with a script by director Billy Wilder and the aforementioned Raymond Chandler that significantly improves on Cain's original story) that have saved Cain from the total obscurity most of his writing so richly deserves.

From the fragmentary evidence of these three novels (and/or the films they inspired) Cain may, however, seem like a creditable enough figure, either as a novelist or a Hollywood story-writer. In his best work, Cain writes with coherence, force, and considerable skill in pacing and characterization. The action is generally propelled, in the best pulp tradition, by

greed, double-dealing, and a perverse sexuality that is virtually the mark of Cain. The Cain hero (a contradiction in terms if ever there was one) is usually a none-too-bright man who thinks he knows what he's doing, even when he can't quite control it. An alluring temptress (personified in the film versions of *Postman* and *Indemnity* by Lana Turner and definitive black widow Barbara Stanwyck respectively) holds a compulsive sexual fascination for the man. It's never entirely clear how much of the attraction is reciprocal, but the perverse chemistry the lovers generate often leads them into areas of human endeavor best left alone. Even death may become an erotic thrill for them. Cain chronicles the downfalls of his characters in clinical detail as they shed the various layers of moral sense and/or decency that once might have constrained their actions. All this allows the author to show — with a zest that reflects where his real interests lie — the lowest forms of degradation and debasement he is capable of conceiving. With low-grade Cain the concoction often gets out of hand, but in *Postman* and *Indemnity*, Cain is at the top of his form, and the flavor of his writing translates to the screen a lot better than you'd expect.

Mildred Pierce is something of a variation on this Cain formula. There the sexual tensions are all developed within the context of family feelings, and the violence is perpetrated on the psyches, rather than the persons, of the various characters. Perhaps because the violence and the strongest sexual feelings are repressed, *Mildred* feels perversely claustrophobic, obsessive, almost repulsively sleazy — in fact, downright *dirty*. Sleaze, a Cain staple, is often the author's undoing, but in *Mildred* he keeps it under careful control, using it, not as an end in itself, but to create a milieu and to motivate and illuminate character (or, to be more precise, the absence of character).

At his best, as he is in these three stories, Cain can offer a receptive reader numerous pleasures, perverse and otherwise. Few sensibilities come more hard-boiled, nor show a stronger sense of the destructive potential of inner compulsions. But some readers, presumably extrapolating from these three novels, and thus judging Cain only on the basis of his best work, seriously overrate the Cain oeuvre. Much of Cain's worst writing is mercifully out of print and hard to find.

If this unavailability is a blessing to the reading public, it is also a bane to anyone attempting to assess Cain's worth. The small part of Cain's total output that has survived is evidently used for comparisons with Chandler or Hammett (both of whose novels are all still in print); even such selective comparisons can scarcely favor Cain, but they implicitly overlook the enormous difference in quality that separates Chandler and Hammett, masters of genre writing, from Cain. Ultimately, though, if Cain is to be taken seriously as one of the masters of hard-boiled fiction, he must be judged on the basis of all his work — not only *Mildred Pierce*, but also such ludicrous historical travesties as *Mignon* and *Past All Dishonor* or obscure novels with unpromising titles like *The Moth* and *Sinful Woman*. With *Love's Lovely Counterfeit*, Cain proved his inability to rise above the level of third-rate Hammett imitation. Interestingly, Cain did admit, with some disdain, to having read "about twenty pages" of Hammett's *The Glass Key*. *Counterfeit* obviously owes an enormous debt to those "twenty pages," and Cain would have done well to read on.

Even Cain's widely-praised writing style is frequently disappointing. Hard-boiled it may be, but its fluidity is often marred by Cain's excruciating fondness for hack detail. (An insect is not merely a moth, but a "blue luna moth," and Cain novels provide detailed descriptions to everything from how to run a restaurant [*Mildred Pierce*] to how to process a ham [*Galatea*]). At its worst, the writing itself can become so mannered and self-conscious that it reads like devastating, if unwitting, self-parody. The following specimen of Cain's "spare, vigorous prose," taken from *The Butterfly*, is, unfortunately, not unique:

"That butterfly, yeah, we got a butterfly in my family. But only the men got it, see? If the child's a girl, it skips. It skips to the next boy. He's not your grandchild, Jess, *he's mine*."

Equally damaging to Cain's claims to seriousness is the crudeness of his sensibility. Despite the delight he takes in setting up and then depicting retribution, Cain seldom shows signs of any moral sensibility more refined than the moralistic posturing that is virtually endemic to his work. This problem becomes most acute in Cain's treatment of compulsive sexuality, one of the touchstones of his writing. At his best, he is — original is the kindest word

that comes to mind — but he is also as lurid, and about as perceptive, as Jacqueline Susann. Cain is typically clumsy in his treatment of incest (a perennial favorite) — in *Rainbow's End*, published in 1975 with the author, then in his eighties, steadfastly resisting the mellowing tendencies of age. In that tale, a character decides, not for the first time in Cain, that a child's parentage — in this case his own — is doubtful. This conveniently rationalizes the affair he has just had with his — presumed — mother. Cain obligingly straightens things out when he has the "real mother," rich, beautiful, affectionate, and suitably unlustful toward her offspring turn up a few pages later. Needless to say, no blame attaches to her for abandoning her son at birth or for turning him over to a seductress. Equally imbecilic is *The Butterfly*, which Cain, with a lack of critical insight equal to his lack of writing talent, felt was, of all his work, closest "in theme and treatment" to literature. There, a man self-righteously staves off his long-lost daughter's ongoing efforts to seduce him, decides that she's not really his daughter after all, marries her, and then discovers, natch, that she really *is* his daughter. Got that? Well, no matter...

Even more lurid and less sensible is the treatment of sexuality in *Serenade*, Mr. C's most overrated story. There, a great opera singer gets too chummy with his (male) patron, and immediately loses his singing voice. Explanation: every man is "5% homo," and if he allows that 5% to take over, he will find that his "voice has no toro," since he is, presumably, no longer a real man. While this may be Cain's last word on the relationship of homosexuality and art, it is, regrettably, not his only foray into the world of grand opera. (Cain pursued an unsuccessful career as an opera singer before he turned to writing.) In *Career in C Major*, a man who is jealous of his wife's half-baked efforts to become an opera star just happens to know the words to a popular song that a woman he has just met happens to have forgotten. He sings them to her, and sure enough, she just happens to be a real opera star who just happens to notice that *his* voice, presumably full of toro, has (as if you hadn't guessed) vast undiscovered potential for singing grand opera.

As all this suggests, Cain's sense of dramaturgy often overwhelms the restraints of sense or psychological

coherence, leaving his stories to advance without the benefit of niceties like dramatic plausibility or logical consistency. Even a genuinely talented, resourceful, and inventive writer would be hard-pressed to cope with the limitations of such ludicrously contrived material; Cain could seldom do more than grind out tawdry best-sellers. Indeed, any writer who focuses insistently on the nuances and perversities of character, and yet can only "illuminate" character through grotesquely impausible plot convolutions that are utterly inconsistent with his self-consciously "realistic" approach, is neither an artist nor a craftsman. Further, anyone who seriously proposes — and then builds a novel around — the idea that 5% homo equals no toro (free translation: homosexuals lack the balls to sing opera) is, to put it bluntly, a hack.

One final bit of information: James M. Cain was, by his own estimation, an exceedingly moral writer; his characters may kill each other, marry their daughters, or even become homos, but they, like their creator, never use dirty words. For the record it should also be noted that Cain never wrote a novel dealing with the subject of bestiality — though when he died last year, at the age of 85, he was hard at work on a new project...

David Coursen

Something Wonderful Right Away

Edited by Jeffrey Sweet

Avon/Discus, 0-380-01884-5

\$2.95, 388 pp., 1978

With unpredictable frequency, breeding grounds pop up here and there among the arts, places where budding talent can sharpen its skills before moving on to individual success. In jazz, Paul Whiteman and Miles Davis graduates have earned individual recognition. The Compass and Second City companies in Chicago (and later in Toronto as well) have given birth to dozens of highly regarded actors, writers and directors, in film and television as well as theatre.

A theatric revue's history reviewed in a film magazine? Look at the contribution made to 20's, 30's and 40's film, by actors, designers, etc. from vaudeville. In addition to deeply affecting the comedy of the 50's and 60's, Compass/Second City has trained many film and television actors, directors, and producers.

Something Wonderful Right Away

is an oral history of Second City and the Compass, the product of four years of interviews and research. This approach is perhaps the main strength of the book; a lot of history and analysis from the people who experienced the two companies, and very little editorializing. Brief informative introductions precede each interview, and a history of both companies introduces the book itself.

This paperback has been packaged with loving care. In addition to the 370 pages of interviews, the book opens with 44 pages of introductory notes and ends with a brief epilogue by the editor, followed by an alphabetical listing of the 71 Compass Players and the 141 members of Second City thus far. Finally, a center photo section gives a look at each "era" of the two companies, from 1955 to 1973.

In July 1955, a group of actors from the University of Chicago crowd opened a show consisting of various types of improvisation at a bar called the Compass. The Compass Players gave us Alan Arkin, Jane Alexander, Shelley Berman, Nichols and May, Stiller and Meara, and other talents. After attracting an audience of artists and intellectuals from the Chicago area for two years, the group disbanded.

Paul Sills, one of the producers at the Compass, formed The Second City with Howard Alk and Bernard Sahlins in 1959. This group fixed itself permanently in the cultural life of Chicago, producing shows to this day as well as having given birth to a second company in Toronto, offshoots like The Committee, and a syndicated television series. Paul Mazursky, Peter Boyle, Robert Klein, David Steinberg, Joan Rivers, Burns and Schreiber, and Gilda Radner are among the many well-known Second City graduates.

The value of the book, aside from nostalgic or historic interest, is that the analysis of the two groups comes from the actors themselves. Generally without prompting, the subjects try to explain the impact of the Compass/Second City experience on their later careers. For example, this assessment by Mike Nichols:

"There's a thing you learn from Compass — if you're doing a play or a movie, you have to say to the audience, first of all, 'You feel fine, you're not worried. We know what we're doing. Everything is OK and you don't have to worry. It's not Judy Garland.' You must do that in the beginning in one way or another. You must tell them

that they're in a situation in which people have the confidence to begin the story they're going to tell (page 85.)"

A few important interviews are missing, however. Elaine May declined to talk with the editor, and the only recent star interviewed is Gilda Radner; an interview with Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, or Bill Murray would have added balance and perspective to the collection.

Compass/Second City graduates have gone on to direct films in surprising numbers, Paul Mazursky and Mike Nichols perhaps being the most well-known examples. Shelley Berman, in his interview, gives the following theory to explain the many directors who have come out of the groups' ranks.

"You are so complete as an improvisationist. You understand the working of an action...You know it from every possible viewpoint. You know it as a playwright would know it, you know it as an actor knows it, and since you are self-directed, you know that, too. Since you are performing publicly, you've also learned how to give and take in terms of blocking. And you learn about the value of lighting... Anyone who really functioned well in that atmosphere became a director, or *should* be a director (page 133)."

Improvisation in film acting is, as we learn in *SWRA*, generally misunderstood. Some important distinctions are drawn in the Mike Nichols interview.

"I've gotten more and more formal and controlled [in directing]. I don't know why. Robert Altman is doing what I would have expected me to be doing. When it works for him, it's better than anything. When it doesn't work, as with all of us, it's not. Every time I decide that I'm going to go in that direction, something pulls me into a style that is much more spare and not so free (page 86)."

Paul Mazursky is another Second City alumni who is assumed to be an "improvisational director." According to his interview, however, Mazursky sees improvisation more as a tool for the writer.

"To me improvisation is like a wonderful tool. I used it as a writer. Larry [Tucker] and I wrote *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* and I think we improvised 75% of it in five days in Palm Springs. We rented a place and went down there and I played one character and he played another and we just put it down on tape. I haven't

worked that way since.

"I improvise only in the sense that I let the actors change a word or two to make it their own. Or if what they're doing doesn't seem to be working well, I'll fool around with it, but generally, I don't really improvise much. Not the way we're talking about improvisation (pages 251-252)."

Another fallacy about improvisation is that it should be translated into film or television. Gilda Radner tells of the problems of taking improvisation off of the stage.

"People ask if we improvise on *Saturday Night*. Well, we can't. I mean, you can bite your foot, but if there's no camera on you, then it doesn't do any good. And you can't change lines because they base camera shots of them.

"But we sometimes develop material improvisationally. I have certain writers who work with me like that. Like I'll say, 'You be the interviewer and I'll be the character,' and that way we find stuff. Or if Belushi and I are in a scene, we'll tape it. We'll just start improvising and tape it, because we do better that way than if we try to sit down and write it out. I wish every writer on our show could spend a couple of months working at Second City and see what it's like. One of the things they'd learn is that people don't talk in paragraphs in normal conversation. Sometimes they just say, 'Uh-huh' and 'What?' (page 369)."

Something Wonderful Right Away gives us the most complete picture yet of the strengths and weaknesses of improvisation. It's a story that has been in need of telling, and Jeffrey Sweet has done a tasteful job of compiling *Something Wonderful Right Away*.
Daniel DePrez

Music

"Scoring" or "Licensed To Sync"

By Daniel DePrez

An issue of *Newsweek* in the not-too-distant past featured a cover story of the man who is the most sure-fire moneymaker in movies today. He is Robert Stigwood. Not a director, actor, writer, or film expert, he is, however, the film producer who is the master of using rock to sell tickets.

With *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*, and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Stigwood is giving reinforcement galore to film executives who have decided to help ensure profits by "scoring" motion pictures with Top 20 hit songs written for the occasion.

The list of this year's movies set to hit songs is formidable, including Stigwood's *Grease* and *Sgt. Pepper, FM*, the re-released *American Graffiti*, *Coming Home*, *Convoy*, *The Buddy Holly Story*, *T.G.I.F.*, and others. The artistic merits of this practice are debatable. What, then, are the financial benefits?

For the studio (Universal/MCA for *American Graffiti*) or producer (Robert Stigwood) who owns rights to a movie's soundtrack album, the benefits can be staggering. Stigwood's RSO Records has, in the *Fever* soundtrack, what might become the best-selling album of all time. Royalties on such an album swell an already considerable income from the film's box-office receipts.

Music publishing is the third source of income for the studio or producer from a hit-album-movie combination. BMI (Broadcast Music Inc., an organization which bills TV and radio stations for performance rights in behalf of music publishers) credits a "movie song" with eight cents per play on a large-audience AM radio station. A song not written for a movie played on the same station receives two and one-half cents per play for its publisher. Since the publisher royalties are the same for publisher and composer alike, the Robert Stigwood Organization (though its Casserole Music division) made as much from the airplay of the Bee Gees' *Fever* songs as did the Bee Gees themselves.

Saturday Night Fever did provide an income for composer David Shire. Shire, who wrote three incidental songs for the films soundtrack, made (quite probably) as much from royalties for three selections from a multi-million-selling soundtrack album as he made for his entire brilliant scores for *The Conversation* and *Straight Time* combined.

In the late fifties and throughout the sixties, a film was scored by a film composer and a "hit single" was tacked onto the picture, usually during the opening credits. The composer made a small amount in royalties in addition to the fee charged for scoring the film, and was glad to get it.

The songwriter was paid in a

number of ways, and always had his hit-song royalties to count on. He didn't try to score any films, and the composer didn't try to write any hit songs.

The composer, however, did sometimes write the film's hit song (usually the only vocal in the score, unlike today) in addition to his other work. Henry Mancini and John Barry are two examples. In the long run, Mancini and Barry have made more from the royalties from "Charade" and "Goldfinger," respectively, than from the films of the same name. It is important to note that each of the two songs is the title song from its respective picture, and no other hit singles came from either picture.

The hit single's duty was, at this time, to keep the film's name before the public. In exchange for his BMI or ASCAP checks, the songwriter gave the producers an assurance of many free plugs on radio and TV.

The ultimate in anomaly in this practise came, perhaps, from Irwin Allen. In both *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno*, a typical film score was amended with a touching love song sung by Maureen McGovern. "There's Got To Be A Morning After" and "We May Never Love Like This Again" (which were sometimes labelled "Love Theme From *The Poseidon Adventure*" and "The Love Theme From *The Towering Inferno*," respectively) related in no conceivable way (thankfully enough) to the carnage around them, both artistic and physical. Both won Oscars for composer Al Kasha, however, and sold singles for the parent company, 20th Century.

Films like *Easy Rider* and *Strawberry Statement* might be offered as examples of movies with popular songs as a score, but both "Born To Be Wild" (*Easy Rider*) and "Something In the Air" (*Strawberry Statement*) were written independently of the movie in which they appeared, and each became a hit without identification with these films. *Easy Rider* fell back on the Hollywood formula and tapped Roger McGuinn for "The Ballad of Easy Rider." The single went nowhere and the film made millions.

The album-supported movie also grows from the decline of the big studios in the late sixties. At this moment, 20th Century-Fox is the only major film studio not owned by a large conglomerate, and even 20th Century owns its own record company.

Finding themselves on constantly shifting sand, the film studios began to look to their extremely stable brothers and sisters in the record division for someone to lean on.

Use of pre-existing music (a la *Easy Rider*) is a painstaking but sometimes rewarding method of building a film out of hit records. In two of this summer's more popular pictures, we see a remarkable contrast in the use of pre-existing music in a score, and the market strength of a well-scored film.

Coming Home and *American Graffiti* are both sixties period pieces. Songs of the era are heard almost constantly in both films. *Graffiti's* music was chosen by director George Lucas and Kim Fowley, a much-disliked L.A. music figure, who gave us B. Bumble and the Stingers, and the Runaways.

The songs in *Coming Home* were picked by producer Jerome Hellman and director Hal Ashby, both well-respected filmmakers. *Graffiti's* soundtrack consists almost entirely of songs which are two to seven years out-of-date. The songs in *Coming Home* are consistent with the film's place in time. The music in *Graffiti* works marvelously well, the music in *Coming Home* does not even come close.

American Graffiti is about the turning point in the lives of a generation. Lucas is saying that the sixties did not really begin until the death of JFK and the Beatles' invasion. The fifties music used in the film points up this "end-of-an-era" theme, and points as well to the turning point posed by the last day of summer.

The sensitive, masterful portrayals given by Jane Fonda and Jon Voight in *Coming Home* are constantly being buzz-bombed by the film's songs. If the Chambers Brothers' music is heard in the background for a few moments at a party, as in *Shampoo*, it adds an authentic flourish to the film. No law exists which states that one must always use every second of a song in a film, no matter how long and dull. When a love scene in bed must try to coexist with the cacophony of cowbells and cuckoos of "Time Has Come," one cannot use chronological accuracy as defense for the butchery which has taken place.

Tasteful selection has its more tangible rewards as well. In the original release alone, the *American Graffiti* soundtrack sold more copies than any *Coming Home* soundtrack can dream of selling.

In both the *Coming Home/American Graffiti* selection method and the *Saturday Night Fever/T.G.I.F.* custom-written method, the same threat is posed. At a time when such excellent film composers as Pino Donaggio, Michael Small, David Shire, and others are working infrequently (and whose work appears on precious few albums), the temptation grows for producers to use top names from the Top 20 charts to write music for their films, and bring in money from three sources (box-office, albums, and publishing).

The final word in this matter of the tail wagging the dog might be the Frankie Valli hit single "Grease." The song (like many in the picture) does not come from the hit musical's score, but was written for the movie. The lyrics spend their time telling us what a great movie *Grease* is, without adding one iota to our knowledge of the characters, setting, etc. In a droning chant, the backup singers repeat the ad slogan ("Grease is the word") throughout the song. The single "Grease" is not a song, it is a marketing concept.



Recueillement By Johannes Lucas

HOW DO YOU LOVE A FILM

For me, when a film has ended, and the lights, which had never been dim enough throughout the film, rise, with the people from their seats, the aisle full already of patrons impatient to get home or indifferent to the credits, having begun to shuffle with their sacks and coats at the first glimmer of the film's conclusion, start to squeeze past the theater employees, who stand placidly, like dock pilings, with the surf twirling their stringy green float-sam, looking with dead eyes over the heads of their customers; when all this activity has begun at the end of a movie I want to be as far away from it as possible, because for me the end of a film is a sad awakening. And when I too finally get to the street, barren now but for a few other stragglers, discussing the film, or trying to decide where to have a beer, I find the illumination of the streetlights rhymes with the movie, the world has a movie tone to it, an intensity and vividness of color that soon passes. I have come out of the theater, the wind has swung shut the rare wood door, cutting off the aroma of popcorn and the hard yellow glare of the lobby, where I have just seen *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, not for the first time. There is an inchoate feeling within me, one of intense, but vague, because unwilling to be located, happiness, that makes me pause on the curb as my eyes turn inward, searching for a name to attach to this feeling, as the clicking of the street-signal, the only sound I hear, proceeds mechanically beside me. Why do I love this film? Is it the film I love, or is it simply a vessel on which I may proceed once again toward self-absorption. The city


cleaves my haze with the impudence of its irregular sounds, and I am reminded of what movie-going used to be like when I was a child, the auditorium a bowl of echos from candy wrappers to nervous, fidgeting kids who cannot hold their tongues or their attention. It was the policy of the Academy theater to reduce the volume of the soundtrack as it played to force the kids to quiet themselves, but this policy never worked, it simply created less of a distraction for those who wanted to talk. They did not always talk, these children who paid their 35 cents (later 50) for the special matinee; sometimes they screamed, as I did at the 3-D movie *The Mask*, and kept going out to the candy counter to buy Good and Plentys, or at *The Man With the X-ray Eyes* which begins with an enormous eye in a jar, floating and staring in such a way that it drove a group of people near me away with the feeling that it was staring at them. There was laughter also, at *The Nutty Professor*, but I remember disappointment at Jerry becoming a cool guy rather than a monster as I had hoped. One went every week regardless of the film, in much the same way as people in the Thirties probably went to the movies two or three times a week. Attitudes change, and eventually monsters and the thrills they provide are no longer incentive enough to see the films, because they no longer provide thrills, and one suspects they never did, one only willed oneself in a feeling of fright, though secretly knowing that the film was not very good, even at that early age. The Academy had beautiful half-circle windows on the doors to the outside and on the inside double doors, and it was always dim in the lobby; there was a feeling of being

in an adult place, like a tavern, which was also always dim and mysterious from the outside as one passed by on the arid heat of summer's sidewalk. The Academy did not have a cry-room, but rather a cry-booth, next to the first door to the first aisle. A tinny speaker would play softly the soundtrack as an irritable mother tried to squelch her baby. Inside the long, dark, humid auditorium three pairs of three descending lights, in tall, narrow, corrugated glass, red, yellow, green, rested on the walls on either side, like stepping stones, on circular, almost heart-shaped, purple lilly pads. Over the red curtain of the right exit door was a small red neon clock. Today the theater is a printing press, situated on what is now a one way street, in a once vital area now reduced to struggling. The cars drive by too fast.

I do not think that it is the memory of cinemas past that makes the movie I have just stepped out of so compelling. The horrors I loved as a child now leave me indifferent, and it is not so much the films that I remember from that time, as the places that I saw them. The love one feels for *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is different in quality, if not in kind, from the potboilers of the past. Socialization is a secret process, and it is something from which to flee in childhood. Today, lamenting the alterations brought upon oneself, regretting the moments in ones past where now, perceiving with sentient hindsight the numerous junctures where the tumbling combinations of events that have left life less than it could have been, first fell, one does not want to hide, one wants to make cognizable the very process, to reinsert oneself into the, possibly mindless, slow ameliorations to which others always seem more privy. I have slowed down, like a pedestrian timing his steps to the movement of the slowly accelerating train, gripping loosely the handrail, waiting for the precise moment to board, when he can execute the move without falling back or injuring himself. But what I am trying to find out is where do I love the film. In what part of my mind are the pleasant physiological-initiated feelings I am now experiencing? It is a giddy exaltation in my chest, an almost sexual tingling, an intense desire to do something, I know not what; art rarely tells its spectators what to do with the incredible sensations it is capable of instilling. Though the film I have just seen is "sad" and sobering, I do not feel

said, and my thoughts on life are not rendered grave and earnest. It is not because I am not responding to the content; on the contrary, the story and its realization by the actors is deeply moving. Nor am I indifferent to the form of the story given to it by the director. But how is the experience of the film translated into pleasure, knowing that the pleasure that I am experiencing is subjective, that others may not have enjoyed the film; and if so, why did they not? Perhaps it might be education, I may know more about movies than another person, but even if I personally educate this other person who has disliked *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, there is still the unexplainable factor that prevents him from liking the film, after I have explained why he should, and which is so often attributed to personal taste, and the differences between people, leading as it does so often to arguments in which one person tries to compel another to like a film, as if he had a personal stock in its success. I am looking for the precise place where the perception of my senses is turned into a physical pleasure. And that is my problem. As Wittgenstein might point out to me, I am trying to pinpoint an ongoing process, and that the reason I can find no particular spot in my being where this change occurs, is because I am asking myself the wrong question, I am being misled by the very way I phrase the question to myself.

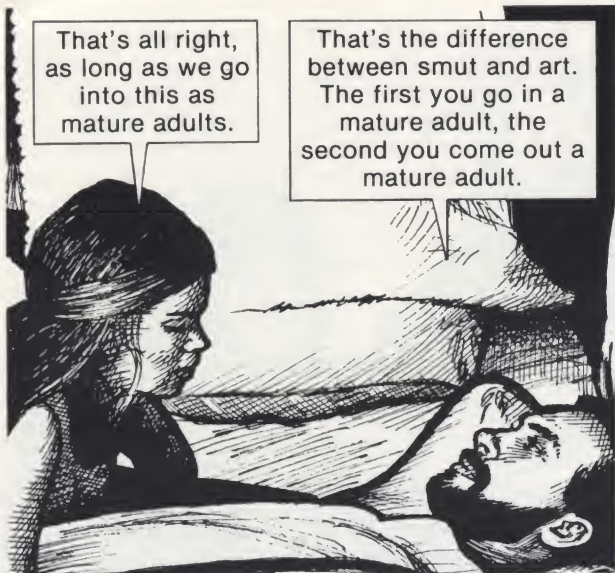
The emotions I felt in the Academy Theater were more intense, but the ones I am feeling now are more complicated, more delicate. Because, as we are watching a film, we are taken up with the many effects of its presentation, distracted by the life of the film as we are distracted by life, we cannot analyze as we are experiencing a film, our reactions to it, as we can the beautiful lilac that surprises us as we turn down that one corner in our neighborhood which we have never walked before, and pause to inhale the scent of the shrub, for no other purpose than the pleasure it provides us, or the memories of the neighborhood of our youth it may provide, jarred into our consciousness suddenly at some odd angle. We do not segment the flower; but how much of a film do we have to like before we like the whole thing? Breaking down a film into its parts can often destroy the pleasure of a film, bring to the fore the fact that its badness outweighs its goodness.

Ultimately there is hate mixed in with the love one feels toward a film, a jealousy felt toward the power of a vision that alters the way one views the world. As I drove home through the familiar streets, dim now with the unseeable brightness of nighttime neon, I was alone, as I wanted to be at the conclusion of the film, and my emotions recoiled from the scrutiny I gave them, obfuscated themselves more behind the cloak of indecision, which keeps us warm from the terrible cold we imagine of destiny. Love is hate is jealousy is love, all impossible to find, like looking at the eye that sees with that very eye. I resent that which I love for imprisoning me in the love that I feel. Sleep will reconcile the mixture of questions and emotions that swirl within, but nothing that swirls within will cease the throb of anticipation in my senses when the film which has sent me to ponder new questions begins again. 

Next issue: *The Driver*; *Sorcerer* and *Wages of Fear*; Murnau's *City Girl*; Herzog; *Notorious*; trailers; *Dispatches from Occupied London*; "Voice Over," by Johannes Lucas. **Forthcoming:** Claudia Jennings; Larry Cohen; *Yojimbo/Fistful of Dollars*; On the set of Altman's latest; four-part series on Nabokov from novel to film; *Barry Lyndon*; American sex comedies of the sixties; Ophuls; and much more.

Contributors: Rick Hermann has contributed to *Movietone News*; Dana Benelli studies film in Seattle; Philip Blomberg migrated to L.A. one year ago; Johannes Lucas's parents moved from Switzerland to Portland when he was two. . . he is writing a novel; William Cadbury alternates as film department head at the University of Oregon; Tom Hyde teaches film at the University of Oregon; Norman Grace studies film in San Francisco; Daniel DePrez writes humor and other related things for national magazines; Gabriel Conroy deals in memorabilia; David Waich is an Oregonian now living in Berkeley. . . he has written and directed a short film entitled, *Caesar's Clue*; Ken Alakine makes many people angry with his ideas on film; Gloria Heifetz lives in Boise, Idaho, where it is very hard to see foreign films; David Coursen has sold articles to *Take One* and *Sight and Sound* and studies film in Eugene, Oregon with the help of Steve Bovay and *Cinema 7*.





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